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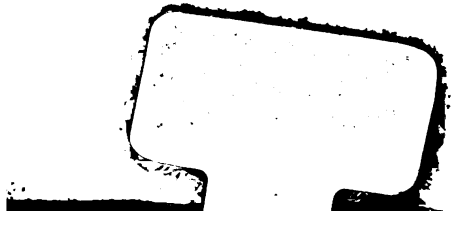
THE CANON'S WARD



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THE CANON'S WARD

BY

JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY' 'HIGH SPIRITS' 'KIT: A MEMORY' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

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THE CANON'S WARD.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TERRIBLE ERRAND.

THE instant that Sophy found herself alone she flew to the bell which summoned her waiting-maid.

'Jeannette, come here, I want you!' she cried, in a hoarse whisper. 'You know what has happened, of course?'

'Yes, indeed, Miss: it's an awful thing to have chanced to anybody. I can't say I'm so sorry as I should wish to be; but I dare say, notwithstanding all that's come and gone, you feel it; one's husband is one's husband.'

'Hush, hush! I am not safe yet, Jenny.'

'Good heavens!' The waiting-maid

turned pale as ashes ; one would have almost thought she anticipated what her mistress was going to say.

'No, not safe. When poor Herbert left me at the mill, this afternoon, he informed me it was his fixed intention to write to his father and tell him all.'

'Oh, indeed !' Jeannette strove to throw some interest into her tone, but the words fell flat. It would have been plain to any one not wrapt in other matters that the girl had expected a much more serious communication.

'Do you not see,' continued Sophy, impatiently, 'that such a letter would be as ruinous to me as though he had told the Canon ?'

'It would have been if it had been written ; but the poor young gentleman never got home to write it.'

'He did, he *did*,' answered Sophy, with intense excitement. 'Henny tells me that what took place happened this evening, not

this afternoon. He went out on the water a second time, and in the meanwhile that letter may have been written.'

'Let us hope for the best, Miss; perhaps it was not written.'

'I have had enough of hope and fear,' replied Sophy, wildly. 'Oh, Jeannette, help me now, and I shall never forget it.'

'I will do anything in the world for you, dear mistress. But what *can* I do? If the letter 's gone——'

'But it has *not* gone,' put in Sophy, eagerly. 'It may have been written, but it could not have been in time for the post. If it was written at all, it will still be lying in poor Herbert's room. Jeannette, you must get that letter.'

'Oh, Miss Sophy, but I cannot, and I dare not.'

A picture had presented itself to her coarse but ready imagination, from which she shrank with horror, albeit she was a bold girl.

'Yet, Jeannette, you have done more than this for me,' pleaded her mistress, 'and with a willing mind. You have done wrong for my sake, even though you disapproved of it, and you cannot disapprove of this. If the letter gets to its destination my secret is out. It will be almost as bad for me as it seemed to have been yesterday.'

'Nay, it will not be so bad as that, Miss.'

In saying those words there was no intention in Jeannette's mind to minimise the calamity of which her young mistress stood in fear, and thereby excuse herself from the task suggested to her; she spoke them with extreme naturalness and naïveté; nothing in her opinion could be so bad, or nearly so bad, as the future that had so lately seemed to present itself to her young mistress—the being mated with Herbert Perry for life.

'At all events, it will be a terrible misfortune,' pleaded Sophy; 'it will lose me my aunt's affection, and my guardian's regard;

my name will become a by-word; I could never survive it. On the other hand, if you will but do me this great service, the last I shall ever ask of you that may not be known to the whole world, nothing need be revealed; all will be well with me as it was before. Think, oh think of that.'

'I do think of it, Miss; it seems too good to be true, don't it? To get out of such a hole as this without even the trace of mud about you.'

'You speak as if I had disgraced myself, Jeannette!' exclaimed Sophy, vehemently. 'How dare you?'

'Oh, I don't mean nothing disagreeable, Miss Sophy. You were married safe enough, worse luck to it. And thanks be to goodness you are a widow.'

'But the letter, Jeannette,' moaned her young mistress; 'the letter. I've thought of a plan to get possession of it.'

'Independent of me, I hope, Miss; least-

ways, I couldn't go into his room to get it, that's flat.'

'It will not be where you think it is,' said Sophy, ghastly pale, and speaking in hushed tones; 'it will be in his sitting-room, on his writing-table, near the window. You know his landlady, Mrs. Aylett?'

'Yes, I know her; to be sure, we can get at it through her. Perhaps for a ten-pound note she may be induced to let us have the letter, and to hold her tongue.'

'No, no. *What*! another one to share my secret, and to keep me under her thumb for life! You must be mad to think of it. We must give her money, of course, but not as a bribe. Now listen to me. It is a shocking thing, but it must be done. You must take these flowers—you may say they came from my Aunt Maria, or even from myself; there will be no harm in that.'

'What, to put them on him! No, Miss, I couldn't do it, not to save my life. I always

feared him, but I fear him now ten thousand times as much. Not if you gave me a hundred pounds I couldn't do it.'

'No one wants you to do it,' said Sophy, earnestly. 'Give them to Mrs. Aylett, *she* will do it; and while she is about it, you will be left alone in the sitting-room. While you have the chance, lose not a moment; the letter will be in the desk or in the blotting-pad, if it has been written at all.'

'Very good, Miss; for your sake I will do my best. I will go to Green Street the very first thing to-morrow morning.'

'To-night! to-night!' exclaimed her mistress, wringing her little hands. 'To-morrow it will be too late. To-day, nothing will be touched; it always is so when there is to be an inquest.'

Sophy's reading of sensational novels had not been labour lost in this case.

'I'd rather lose my thimble first, Miss Sophy, than venture on such a thing,' replied

the girl. 'Yet for your sake I'll try it. Give me the flowers.'

'Good Jeannette, dear Jeannette, you are the best of friends; think how I shall count the moments till you come back again.'

Then Sophy took the flowers, and, notwithstanding the need for haste, with neat-handed skill and taste arranged them, and gave them to her maid; for woman's fingers are not as those of men, but will deftly work when the heart is sick with sorrow and heavy with trouble, and devise things of beauty for the tomb as if they were for the altar.

For a few minutes after Jeannette's departure her young mistress sat sick at heart, and already tremulous with expectation of her return; then suddenly she rose, and went to her desk. It had for the first time occurred to her that therein also lay proof of her clandestine relations with the dead man; which, though indeed they did not hint of marriage, were significant enough of the

affection that had once existed between them. She had not hitherto destroyed them, partly because her husband, if he was bent on disclosure, stood in no need of them to prove his case; and partly perhaps from woman's vanity. Though the man had been dead to her, and fear had usurped love's place long before he had met his death, he had been her lover once. Here were protestations of passions, pleas for haste, and assurances of eternal affection, some true, some false, but all breathing an incense which had at one time been very grateful to her. They had none of them passed through the post—for in those days he had been very cautious—but had been conveyed to her by his own hand, under circumstances wherein confidential speech had been impossible. As they had met, or parted company, at balls, or during some morning call, the hand, which was now cold and nerveless, had thrust them into her too willing palm.

If such evidence as this had escaped her attention, might there not be other such in existence which could one day be brought to light? Upon consideration, she felt confident that such was not the case. Gifts he had had from her; but such as he might have received, and probably had received, from other girls (a reflection that gave her comfort rather than pain), but no letters. She had never been so reckless as to write to him, either before or since their marriage. The witnesses of that ceremony, mere officials in one of the City churches, and Jeannette herself, were now the only repositories of her secret. If Herbert had not put his threat of writing to his father into effect, or if that letter could be secured, she would be safe. But would it be secured? It was ten o'clock when Jeannette had departed on her errand, and the sudden sound of the quarter, brought upon the wings of the north wind from some college clock, had but just died away. How

terrible was this time of waiting! Books, to which she had hitherto been indebted, when alone, for many hours of forgetfulness and comparative ease, had now no power to enchain her attention: her eyes, her ears, her every sense (though she knew that at least an hour must elapse before her messenger's return) were on the watch.

The letters of the dead man were in her hand, and she was about to put them into the empty grate, previous to setting fire to them, when a sudden impulse—or the attraction of repulsion—prompted her to read them. She sat down and took them out one by one from the indiarubber band that held them together, and, as it happened, in their inverse order as to date. There were one or two written after their marriage, appointing time and place for their clandestine meetings; but even these were not free from reproaches and expressions of disappointment, as well as impatience—even threats. 'I give you

fair warning,' he wrote, 'that I am getting tired of this hide-and-seek existence.' There were references of a disrespectful kind to her guardian, and then there came an opinion, bluntly enough expressed, that she might 'play her cards' in such a manner as to 'get on the blind side of him,' and confess all without much hurt. 'It was all very well for her,' he said, 'to enjoy herself at balls and parties, just as though she were her own mistress,' and 'condescend' to see him when she had a mind; but it was not so pleasant to him, who was short of money, worried by duns, taken to task by the 'governor' about his degree; he was treated, in short, like a schoolboy, and was pretty well determined to put an end to it and assert himself. The Canon might not make them a very handsome allowance just at first, perhaps; but he (Herbert) wanted to be his own master. In reply, apparently, to some remonstrance of hers, where she reminded him of his solemn

promise to keep matters secret until she came of age, he hinted that 'all things were fair (lies included) in love or war.' Harsh letters these—cruel letters, which she burned one by one, with set lips and a frowning brow. Presently she came against one written on the eve of their secret marriage. This was couched in very different terms—it breathed not only affection, but promises of eternal love and fidelity. The paper trembled in her hand as Sophy read it, He had procured, he said, 'a special license,' and fulfilled the legal conditions by living in the same parish for so many days. She remarked how at the time she had smiled over his bad spelling, and resolved to undertake the task of improving him in this particular. He had then seemed ready enough to submit himself to her wishes; to sit at her feet, and generally to be guided by her in social and domestic matters. But instead of a pupil she had found him to be a master;

obstinate of temper, intolerant of the least interference or suggestion, impracticable, churlish, vain. Still, remembering what he had been, or had seemed to be, she destroyed this memento with a sigh.

There remained the letters of the lover. In them was no trace of ill-humour—all was sunshine with no shadow. He had seemed to be like some young Greek god stooping from the clouds to woo her, and not only to woo but to worship. When she had first read those fervent words of admiration and devotion, she had felt herself more than mortal, though, in fact, she had been only too human. What promises, what protestations, what passion! It is not necessary to spell correctly to use the language of love with eloquence. Even now, when it was all falsified, and those vows had been proved to be but dicer's oaths, it carried her away with it. For the moment, as she read, the past returned to her. Once more she was a young

girl, without experience of the world, full of tender dreams ; the man of her choice had declared himself : he was the handsomest of created beings, and one of the best, though (as is always the case) there was a want of appreciation of him in some quarters. It was only, however, necessary to know him (as *she* did) to love him. What a future had seemed to lay before her !

At the remembrance of all these things Sophy's heart melted within her, and she burst into tears—not because the man we knew was dead, but another man, whom, to say truth, no one but herself had known, and because all the hopes and joys of her life had perished with him. As she sat with bowed head over the grey, ghostly ashes of these letters, Jeannette came softly into the room. Her face was deadly pale, and her head moved from side to side, but not in negation ; it was only that trembling motion which, when their nerves are highly wrought, some

women, otherwise self-possessed, are unable to repress.

'You have found it?' cried Sophy, starting to her feet.

'Yes, I have found it. And when you have done thanking Heaven, Miss Sophy' (for her mistress had broken out into the most passionate expressions of devotional gratitude), 'you may consider a little what *I* have gone through to get it. There it is. It was terrible to have to hold it in my hand; but it is what you wanted, I hope.'

'Yes, yes,' murmured Sophy, gazing at the letter, the envelope of which was unfastened, with eager, heated eyes. 'This is his father's address. I have no doubt it is what I wanted; but would you mind making sure, Jeannette? I—I hardly like to read it.'

It was not the notion of infringing a private right (since she had, indeed, become possessed of the thing by so doing) that caused her to feel this scruple; but a certain

tenderness for the dead man himself, which, now that all danger was over, began for the first time to stir within her. She did not wish to have any new cause of dislike or dread against him, such as the contents of this missive were almost sure to prove.

'Read it!' exclaimed Jeannette. 'I wouldn't read it if you gave me fifty pound. Is it not enough that you made me steal it, with him lying dead and cold—there, there, I didn't mean to cast it up against you, Miss Sophy,' put in the girl, frightened at her mistress's look of horror; 'it was not quite so bad as you are thinking, after all.'

There was silence between the two women for a moment or two.

'Would you mind telling me all that happened?' said Sophy, gently.

Did she mind! As if the one real guerdon of such an enterprise had not been the right and privilege of narrating it! As if the sole thought which had lately buoyed her up in

a sea of superstitious terror had not been the reflection that she would hereafter pose before an audience (limited though it must needs be to one person) as the heroine of a melodrama!

She told her story with a solemn face and in a gruesome tone, which, as she flattered herself, enhanced its horror.

'I let myself out quietly, Miss Sophy, by the back door, and hurried down the street to do your bidding. It seemed to me as if every one I met must needs know what I was bent upon, and nobody can tell the shivers that seized hold upon me as I neared my journey's end. When I got to the house in Green Street the blinds were down; and somehow that reminded me so of what lay within it, that you might have knocked me down with a feather. However, I rang the bell, which was answered by Mrs. Aylett herself. Perhaps she found it company, poor woman, to attend to the door; and, anyway, she seemed very pleased to see me. She told

me how it had all happened, of course, and how he had been brought on a stretcher, with his beautiful face covered up, which gave her such a turn, she said, as she thought she should never get over to her dying day. There was nobody had been to see him, though many had called to hear if the news was true; and Mr. Mavors, the Tutor, had just been and seemed frightened almost to death, though there was nothing now to frighten anybody she said, for he looked as comely as could be with his fine limbs showing through the sheet, poor fellow, and would I like to see him. "No," said I, thanking her kindly, "I wouldn't like that, if it was ever so; but I had brought some flowers from my mistress, who had known the poor young gentleman."

'"Oh, yes," she said, "she knew that," and in such a meaning tone that it almost made my heart stop; "but I must not suppose," she went on, "that you were the only

one, for that there would be many a sore young heart in Cambridge, by reason of the news that day."'

'Mrs. Aylett said that, did she?' inquired Sophy, in a low, cold tone.

'She said so, Miss Sophy; but, bless you, there's no need to fash yourself upon that account: young men are all alike, it's my belief, except that some is worse than others; and, besides, Mrs. Aylett is one of those people as like to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. No one else, she allowed, had thought of sending him any flowers, which was not only kind and tender, but a deal better plan, she said, than putting them on a coffin—wreaths that might have cost a guinea or more, perhaps—only to be buried in the damp cold earth, and to be of use to nobody; she would take care that those should be upon his breast above the coverlet, where his dead eyes might rest upon 'em. Don't ye cry, Miss Sophy; don't ye cry; it's better for you

as matters are, and better, may be, for him, for it's my belief he would never, never have come to any good had he lived to the age of Methusaleh. Then, calling to mind my errand, I said that it was your wish that I should bear witness to the flowers being placed where you would have them, only that I dared not venture into the room ; and Mrs. Aylett, saying that could easily be contrived, beckoned me to follow her upstairs. Now, as you remember, Miss, poor Mr. Perry's rooms communicate with one another by folding doors, but there is a step or two between them, so that one cannot pass from one to another in a moment.'

Sophy bowed her head and trembled. She remembered it very well.

'Then when Mrs. Aylett left me in the sitting-room I lost not an instant, but ran up straightway to his writing-table, as you had enjoined on me, and the very first thing I saw, leaning up against the upper portion of

the desk, as if waiting to be posted, was that letter, directed to his father. I thrust it in my pocket in a flash, and was ready for the landlady when she came out, close by the folding door, with the money you had given me for her. She took it, though not very willingly, saying that she did not need a present for doing what was nothing but a pleasure to her, though a sad one ; and then I came home with my heart beating pit-a-pat, with the letter in my bosom, feeling like lead.'

Sophy rose with grateful looks and kissed the girl. 'Until you brought this to me, Jeannette,' she said, '*my* heart was lead. Though this sad matter is now over, and all belonging to it'—here she put the closed letter into the flame of the candle, and held it till it was utterly destroyed—'I shall never forget the service you have done for me—never, never; but we will talk of that to-morrow. It is getting late, and you must

be tired enough after all you have gone through.'

'Very good, Miss Sophy,' returned the other, lingering at the door; 'are you sure you would not like me to sleep in your room to-night?'

'No, thank you, Jeannette,' answered her mistress, simply, so buried in her own thoughts that she could not perceive what could be plainly read in Jeannette's frightened face, that the waiting-maid was saying two words for herself and one for her mistress.

How diverse and opposite, within the space of a few moments, are the emotions of a human soul! How sudden are its changes from apprehension to self-complacency, and how, in a flash (like the ten thousand faces on a race-course), its outlook on existence alters from dark to light! Left once more by herself, Sophy seemed a different being from that watcher in the night of a few seconds ago. A weight had been removed from her,

the absence of which gave an unutterable sense of relief: she felt a new creature, blessed beyond all hope or expectation; and yet, unhappy girl, she dared not thank God for it. She was confident that all was now secure; that her old life was over and done away with, and that a new one was about to dawn, in which, taught by bitter experience, she would avoid all quicksands.

Whereas, alas! it was only one chapter of the old life that had closed. There is no Red Sea in which by any incantation known to man the Ghost of Folly and Falsehood can be laid at rest.

CHAPTER XIX.

FREEDOM.

BETWEEN the deathbed and the charnel a battle often arises concerning the departed, like the buzzing of flies over garbage. His virtues are magnified, his vices are exaggerated; he is 'made more of' in every way than when he was in life. In the case of a man of loose life, and who has omitted to make himself popular, we can believe nothing of what is said, though from the very extravagance of it some truth may be gathered. Mr. Herbert Perry's memory suffered like the rest, and a little more, as a young gentleman who combines vice with economy, in my opinion, deserves to suffer. Miss Jeannette

had showed her knowledge of human nature —assisted, no doubt, by her sensitiveness to the omission of vails to discreet waiting-maids—when she had said that the man, if he had lived to the age of Methuselah, would never have come to any good. Still there is something in youth and beauty cut off in their prime that is deplorable.

In an undergraduate community the circumstance, as is natural, makes a stronger impression than elsewhere. Death then, it is made plain to them, does not confine itself to the aged and the ailing, and not only knocks at the door of old and young alike, but enters most discourteously without knocking. That a man who could fell a bargeman at a blow, and pull a boat round against two men, should be caught by the leg and drowned by a weed or a river chain (for there were doubts which had done it) seemed amazing. Cambridge preachers, we may be sure, were in no want of a topic for their next Sunday's dis-

course. 'Here to-day and gone to-morrow;' flesh was grass, and, above all (think of it, young men), thus liable to be cut down while it was yet green. Summoned into the presence of his Creator without a moment's time for repentance for the sins of his youth. As if the Almighty Disposer of all human events should not take *that* into account, and make allowance for an omission that it is not in human power to remedy!

The regret for the fatal occurrence was, truth to say, much more abstract than particular. Mrs. Aylett shed a genuine tear or two for her handsome lodger, to whose merits his untimely end drew her attention, perhaps for the first time; but shed many more from respect, as it were, to the unities—necessities of dramatic narration. The occurrence was literally meat and drink to her—for it made her a welcome guest in the household of many of her class—and indirectly clothing, since she possessed herself of many unconsidered

trifles belonging to the deceased, in the first instance as mementoes, but which, when time began to heal her tender wound, she disposed of to advantage. No doubt Mr. Perry, senior, mourned his son, regretted (very unreasonably) the stiffness of tone of that last letter suggesting Australia to the prodigal, so soon to sail for a much more distant and populous colony, whence no news comes either by post or wire. But if he did mourn, and without hope, his sorrow was mitigated by subsequent circumstances, when his son's bills came in, which they did with somewhat indecorous haste, as is apt to happen when a dead debtor is under age. That the gravest of his emotions were not of a very sentimental character may be gathered from the fact that the young man's furniture and personal effects were not sent home, but disposed of by private contract to a dealer in the town.

Among the young man's own companions,

beyond a 'poor fellow' or a malediction on the practice of putting chains on rivers (unheard of since Xerxes' time), there were few expressions of real regret. Except as a first-rate oar, the young man had not been popular, and the sense of loss evoked by his death mainly arose from *esprit de corps*; as when Front de Bœuf was slain his friends only remarked, 'a giant limb lopped off Prince John's enterprise,' so it was generally observed of Herbert Perry, 'it will be a great disadvantage to our boat at Putney next year' in connection with the University race.

His funeral, however, was largely attended. Almost all the boating men showed, so far, some respect for their departed chieftain. Mr. Mavors, too, was there, still acting as deputy to the truant Mr. Prater, and the Canon himself, a yet more unwilling mourner. Such ceremonies were hateful to him; but since the young man had been an occasional visitor at 'The Laurels,' and belonged to his own college,

so much of respect seemed due to his memory. This was the more to the Canon's credit, because his presence might have been disagreeably attributed to a nearer tie, the name of the dead man having been coupled in some quarters with that of Sophy.

Upon the whole, however, it was agreed that that matter had been at most but a passing flirtation; the Canon spoke of it as such himself, and was much more inclined than Miss Aldred—whose nerves had received a considerable shock—to ignore it. He wished things to go on at home 'as if nothing had happened,' and thought his sister not only injudicious, but foolishly sentimental, in making so much of it as she did. In this view he was greatly corroborated by the behaviour of Sophy herself; who, though exhibiting becoming seriousness, seemed by no means cast down. Indeed, were it not much more easy to feign melancholy than satisfaction, she might have been placed in a

difficult position ; for, put the case to herself as she would (and she made some meritorious efforts to feel herself bereaved), it was not to be denied that a crowning mercy had been vouchsafed to her. After having all but made shipwreck of her young life, she found herself in port again, ready to start upon a new voyage, and this time with certain rocks and quicksands very plainly marked out upon her chart. It is shocking to say so, but as a matter of fact it happens probably to one person out of every six to have good cause to rejoice in the death of a fellow-creature. He has done us harm, he will do us more harm, and his demise is not only a material benefit, but release from tyranny and despotism. Why should we not rejoice ? Not of course openly, because that would be indecent and offensive, but in our private chamber. It would be horrible, indeed, to feel pleasure in any misfortune happening to him ; in his pecuniary ruin, or in the failure of his health

or mental faculties, but why should death be a misfortune to him? If, notwithstanding his ill-behaviour to ourselves, he is a tolerably good fellow at bottom (which, however, we don't believe for an instant), why should we deplore his removal to a higher and better sphere? While, on the other hand, if he is a bad man, who has never lifted finger to help his fellow-creatures with their burdens, but has rather added to their weight, how much better is it that this subtractor of the sum of human happiness should be wiped off the slate! He boasted, with reason, that he had his way here, no matter at what cost to others; why, therefore, should we not congratulate ourselves that a spirit so masterful for evil has gone elsewhere, where he will find his match; or, for aught we care—for we wish him no harm—be appreciated. The cheapest form of charity that has yet been discovered is, no doubt, to speak with approval of a dead scoundrel; but to deplore his death, however

decorous it may sound, is an hypocrisy that imposes upon no one.

No; Herbert Perry had under false pretences won from Sophy her first love, had had at his mercy (only to abuse the trust) her fair fame, and had been about to exact from her a sacrifice which he had pledged his word not to claim—and that she should keep his memory green, or mourn over his untimely fate, was a little too much to expect. It pleased the Canon to find that Sophy did not shut herself up and decline to see people. He had thought it not unlikely that, after the manner of her sex, she would have made as much as possible out of what had occurred, and have 'posed' as one bereaved and a victim of fate. He thought she took a most sensible view of things, at the same time congratulating himself that his apprehensions respecting her attachment to Mr. Perry had proved groundless. It was now clear to him that there had been nothing serious between

the two young people. His sister, who knew better, was not so pleased. Now the 'poor young man' was dead she forgot what was detrimental in him, and felt only pity for his sad end. She could have easily forgiven the girl for having indulged in even passionate grief, though it might have caused some domestic inconvenience: she thought her philosophic behaviour a little heartless (while admitting that it was for the best), and was, on the whole, 'disappointed' in Sophy.

One thing, however, she did set down to that young lady's credit. Although she had apparently forgotten her old lover with something of undue haste and ease, she exhibited no desire to encourage a new one. After a week or so the Canon had proposed to bring Adair home with him again, for a quiet dinner, and had deputed his sister to sound Sophy as to whether such an arrangement would be agreeable to her, when the girl had positively declined to be present; the reason

of her refusal, it was understood, was the association of Adair's last visit with the recent catastrophe : and it was no small satisfaction to Miss Aldred that Sophy had withstood what had been always an attraction to her (*i.e.* a young man's company) from so sentimental a consideration. Sophy's real reason was that Adair was associated with her humiliation. He had no longer, it is true, any power to harm her ; but she did not forget that when he had had the power he had shown a disposition to take undue advantage of it. There had been something in his manner that suggested that she was under his thumb, and this could only have arisen, of course, from a suspicion of her relations with the dead man. She had not forgotten that walk home with him (though it seemed so long ago) from the Canon's rooms, and his allusions to that interview she had been so indiscreet as to give her husband in the 'Roundabout,' when she was supposed to be

at a ball, of which the young scholar had been an accidental witness. While exposure had threatened her from a more serious quarter, Adair's possession of this fact had not loomed so large among her perils; but now that no material harm had come, or could come of it, she confessed to herself how wrong her conduct must have seemed to him. Indeed, in one view, since it was now impossible to clear herself by saying 'Herbert Perry was my lawful husband,' the incident, so far as Adair was concerned, had a more unfortunate significance than ever.

Nor was a young gentleman so audacious, and so little given to delicacy, likely to give up the hold upon her which chance had given him. As compared with her former case, she was beyond the reach of his malice, but she was not in a position to defy him, and her best chance of keeping on good terms with him, as it seemed to Sophy, was to keep him at a distance. She was not absolutely

afraid of him—she was afraid of nothing now —but it would be necessary to be very guarded with him, and to use any artifice to explain away his suspicions; and, to do Sophy justice, she was resolved to have done with artifice. Circumstances—as we are wont to term the consequences of our own folly—had compelled her of late to throw dust in the eyes of those about her; but it was not the amusement to her which it is to some people. What she longed for was to breathe freely in clear air, and it grieved her very much that it was still necessary to play a part with those about her.

With the Canon, as we know, she had succeeded; but with Aunt Maria she had only had a very moderate degree of success; while with Henny Helford she had a secret consciousness that she had made something very like a failure. Henny could not understand the philosophy with which her friend bore the loss of her lover. She had never

compared Herbert Perry with her own Frederic, had never even admitted that Sophy was really 'wrapped-up' in the young man, or thought of him seriously as a possible husband; but there had certainly been tender passages between the two young people. He had not been 'the summer pilot of an empty heart unto the shores of nothing,' as other young men, Henny had reason to believe, had been before him; and something seemed due to his memory beyond a squeezed-out tear or two and a respiration, which, if it was a sigh at all, sounded like a sigh of relief. Henny could understand that the breaking of Sophy's engagement might, on the whole, be a source of real satisfaction to her, as it undoubtedly was to her friends; but the catastrophe which had caused it might surely have evoked some natural sorrow. It was not, of course, desirable, and could not be expected, that Sophy should put on mourning; but she might have worn for a few weeks, as regarded

manner, a decent garb of melancholy. She did so when in company; but when Henny alone was present, she decidedly wore colours. Now and then, indeed, when there was any mention of the dead man's name, she became grave enough (like some conventional mourner at a funeral, who breaks off his story at the chapel door); but, on the whole, Sophy's behaviour—though Henny kept her thoughts upon the subject to herself—not a little scandalised her young friend.

What was curious, however, Sophy's health did not improve with her spirits; which caused certain wise and ingenious persons, such as abound everywhere, to observe that it was easy to see that the apparent cheerfulness, which did Miss Gilbert so much credit under the circumstances, was purchased at a high price. It was Jeannette's impression—who, it is needless to say, did not share in this opinion—that her young mistress wanted exercise; and, indeed, it was many days since

she had left the house, or extended her walk beyond the garden.

'I am quite sure, Miss,' she said—for she always called her 'Miss,' to Sophy's great content—'that one of your old "constitutionals" would do you a great deal of good.'

'I am very well as I am, thank you,' she replied; 'and I cannot say that I take any pleasure now in walking about Cambridge.'

Jeannette smiled a little contemptuously; she knew that the associations to which Sophy alluded were not of a nature to evoke much regret.

'It isn't, Miss, as if you were liable to meet folks,' she went on. 'I am sure the town looks as if the plague was in it; all the young men are gone down for the long vacation.'

'Not all of them,' returned Sophy, with quiet significance.

'Um—well, of course, you will do as you please, Miss; but the young gentleman can't

bite you ; and I must say your being so set upon keeping out of his way must look to him very much as if you were afraid of him.'

'I am not afraid of him, Jeannette ; I'm not the least afraid of him, nor of any one else, thank Heaven.'

'Still, I wouldn't be uncivil to him, if I was you, Miss.'

'I am not uncivil. What incivility is there in my keeping within doors when I am not inclined to go out ? I like my home, and am happy in it ; I love the liberty that I had lost and have regained ; and I will never again run the risk of losing it—at all events, to the person you have in your mind.'

'Oh, lud! Miss, I didn't mean that. One may be reasonably kind to a young man, I hope, without intending to marry him.'

'No doubt, but the person in question is, in my opinion, a dangerous one to deal with ; if you give him an inch he takes an ell, and any attempt to conciliate him only convinces

him that you are in his power. Now, I am not in his power, and never intend to be.'

'Very good, Miss. I am sure I hope you never may be.'

'May be? How can I be? What do you mean?'

'Nothing, Miss, nothing; only it's never well to be positively certain about anything; and especially as my poor old grandmother used to say, who had seen better days, though she died in the workus, "Don't boast."'

CHAPTER XX.

TO A SON IN INDIA.

NOTWITHSTANDING that time-honoured quotation concerning a 'touch of nature'—always used, by-the-by, in a totally different sense from that intended by him who wrote it—the men and women one meets with are, to judge by their behaviour, by no means enamoured of naturalness. The great majority of them may, indeed, be divided into two classes—the one, generally known as 'gushers,' who exaggerate their feelings; and the other, the 'capsuled,' who conceal them. The former, of course, afford the greatest amusement, and therein may claim a debt of gratitude from their fellow-creatures; but the latter, who

hold them in particular contempt, are not a whit more sensible, though less ludicrous.

I met a widower the other day truly sorry for his loss, who expressed to me his thankfulness to some Power or another that he had never throughout his recent bereavement given way to 'sentiment' even for a moment. 'What I was always saying to myself,' observed the poor fellow, 'when I felt the tears coming, was, "Now this is sentiment;" and that enabled me to suppress them.' I did not reply, as truth would have suggested, 'The more fool you!' But I could not help feeling a contempt mingling with my pity for him. If he had let Nature have her way, and not attempted a *rôle* entirely unfitted for him (that of the North American Indian), he would have borne his misfortunes far more easily.

Even those soldiers who (in the good old time), being cut to pieces by the cat-o'-nine-tails, made it a point of honour not to cry

out, had a bit of leather in their mouths to chew; and whenever there is repression there is leather, or something equally unwholesome. It is, indeed, contemptible and unmanly to whine and howl about one's private calamities before the crowd; but if one is so fortunate as to possess a loving friend, to close one's heart against his sympathy in time of trouble is an act of weakness, none the less foolish because we flatter ourselves it is a proof of strength and wisdom. To a very few men stoicism is as natural as silence to a rat in a trap, but the majority of our Stoics are merely capsuled. They are not, of course, Gushers, effervescent, without moral restraint or expression; or being thus unnaturally checked, they would burst like a champagne bottle unrelieved of its 'tisanne;' but they have their fair share of human emotion, and conceal it from mistaken ideas of what is becoming. This was the case with Canon Aldred. He loved his sister, had an affectionate regard

for his ward, and entertained the kindliest feelings (which were duly reciprocated) for troops of friends; but his heart was with his boy in India, and of him he rarely spoke to any one. To have manifested, even to his nearest and dearest (save one), his devotion to his only son would have seemed to him a weakness. He deemed paternal love, 'like faith and prayers, the privatest of men's affairs,' and had scarcely exhibited it even to its object while it was still with him. But now his Robert was so many hundred miles away, in a dangerous climate, and bound to be there so long, he could no longer afford to conceal his affection from him. There were too many chances on both sides against their ever meeting in this world to admit of reticence; and he was not so positively certain, perhaps, as a divine should be of their meeting in the next. At all events, should Heaven grant that precious boon, it would be strange and sad indeed if it should then be necessary to

inform his son for the first time how much he had loved him—a thing that will have to be done, perchance, by a good many undemonstrative persons.

As the Canon sat alone in his college rooms, with his chin in his left hand and a pen in his right, and with that large thin notepaper before him, on which we send our winged thoughts afar, he thinks of these things. A poem of a modern but well-nigh forgotten writer steals into his mind, dealing with matters after death, when the soul is as a hand withdrawing from a glove, and he who speaks is dead and mourned, or mismourned, by those he has left behind him.

> Dear hearts, they have all come,
> And think me dead—me, who so know I'm living,
> The vitalest creature in this fleshly room.
> That was my darling boy's—that kiss.

And at those words this man of reticence and philosophic calm, conceiving to himself his Robert's last adieu, let fall some tears; for, amazing as it may seem, though of mature

years and a Canon, he was a person of the liveliest imagination.

By his side were two letters, to which (as though he had not known every word of them by heart!) he more than once referred as he wrote on. They were the only ones he had received from his son since his departure, and dear to him as that sacred memento from dead Milton's head: bright, chatty impressions of a first acquaintance with a strange land. What was a marvel, indeed, considering that they came from India, there were no complaints in them. When things were not rose colour, they afforded an opportunity, not for grumbling, but for a sly touch of humour. From these graphic touches you might have guessed the writer's character, to which knowledge you were, moreover, assisted by a portrait done by a native artist. If not very successful as a work of art, it served to recall every lineament to the father's eye; while just so much of novelty was added by the

attire, suitable to the climate, as gave piquancy to the likeness. 'So this is my Indian Robert, is it?' was the Canon's remark, murmured with the coo of a pigeon, followed by a secret reflection that the boy looked even a finer fellow abroad than he had looked at home.

The picture, indeed, represented as wholesome, hearty a young fellow as parent's eye could wish to look upon; a bigger, broader figure than the Canon; with keener eyes and a more resolute mouth, but with something of his father's kindliness in the expression, which became his young face well. Brown speaking eyes, brown curling hair, and cheeks already embrowned by the Eastern sun, the whole set off by very light-coloured apparel, gave an expression of acclimatisation that augured well for his physical health; while, on the other hand, that there was no alien change in his disposition was clear from the tone of his letters. Though lively they were

singularly simple, and breathed a filial affection so tender that they might very well have been addressed to a mother instead of a father. He spoke of his expenses, his pursuits, his amusements, and even his love-affairs, with the greatest frankness. 'Pray tell Aunt Maria,' he wrote, 'that she is quite right about the percentage of sunstrokes; out of every ten Europeans about nine fall victims to it; in the native tongue it is termed brandy pawnee. Sophy, too, has proved only too true a prophetess as regards the other calamity. Her name is Alma Treherne, the daughter of a fire-eating Colonel. He has a good Government appointment, so that she is altogether out of my reach; but she leans down from the heavens and smiles upon me a little. She is faultless, save in one respect, which time will remedy: she is but seventeen. I need not tell you, alas! not to take this communication too seriously. It is, I know, but a dream; but you used to say

that at my time of life there is no harm in dreaming. To-morrow I start for the Hills, a thousand miles away. When I come back she will doubtless, as Praed sings, be "Mrs. Something Rogers." Yet I don't think that "in *my* heart's most secret cell there will have been any other lodgers." There—I hear you saying, "What nonsense!" as you fix your glasses more tightly on your dear nose; but you know, father, it was agreed between us that we should tell each other everything.'

The Canon did not say 'What nonsense!' and took his glasses off his nose to wipe them with his handkerchief. He was not angry with Miss Alma Treherne; far from it; he thought her a young lady of good taste to have been captivated (so he translated Robert's statement of the circumstance) with his darling boy; and only grudged her her opportunities. What would he not have given, what would he not give now, for one clasp of the hand of his absent son!

There was much more of narrative and chit-chat, but the *pièce de résistance* of his epistolary fare (though it did not appear there had been much resistance) was that allusion to the young lady. The Canon proceeded to answer his son's letter with reciprocal warmth and frankness.

Oh pen, beyond all magic of wing, that can waft love and gentleness to the ends of the earth, and grave our thoughts at home upon hearts ten thousand miles away! It is the nearest approach, save telegraphy, that has yet been discovered to that much-desiderated attribute of being in two places at once. While the Canon wrote his home news, his eyes were in India watching that sunburnt young fellow reading it: and when the other should come to read it, his leal young heart would have fled home to the kind scribe. It was a long epistle, which was, of itself, a proof of the Canon's affection, for he was a man who rarely spoke or wrote at length;

what he had to say he expressed concisely, though often humorously, and never paid his hearers the bad compliment of taking them for a common jury. It will be sufficient for our purpose to quote a sentence or two.

'What you say about Miss Treherne, my dear boy, I need scarcely tell you, especially interested me. It is a dream (as you admit yourself) from which you will awaken not one whit the worse. It is as natural for a young man to turn his thoughts, in honour, to a fair woman as for a flower to turn to the sun: and perhaps the earlier the better. Even if nothing comes of it (as is likely to happen in this case), his heart is the better and the wiser for such an experience. If he has a good heart to begin with, he will wish her well and not ill, though circumstances may award her to another. From what you tell me of the fire-eating Colonel, I should doubt your taking to him as a father-in-law, while I am afraid (which is of more conse-

quence) that your prospects would hardly recommend you as a suitor for his daughter's hand. I am a very selfish ease-loving old fellow, you know, and have not much to spare you. Though I will do my best when the time comes, I cannot promise any great increase of your allowance. One must look ahead in these things; and remember that two young people in the bonds of matrimony, if I may borrow the language of the Board of Directors of my Insurance Company, "have power to add to their number." My policy will be of no use to you, but rather the reverse, till after my death; and, as you know, what I have is chiefly income, which the necessity of my position compels me to spend pretty freely. That you will make your own way in the path you have chosen I feel well convinced; but your shoulders must be free at starting. Travels with a knapsack must be made *en garçon*. You will not think me cruel, dear boy; but deem me rather only

"cruel to be kind," in these words of warning. In all things you will have my sympathy, my confidence, and my help as far as it can be stretched. Oh, feeble are these words to express the love I bear you! If Fate were kinder, how eagerly would I say, "Come home, my Robert, and bring your Alma with you."

'The cup of life in this respect, as in so many others, is dealt to us in different measures. In Sophy's case, for example, if only she could find a suitable match (I thought of one at one time, you remember, but you differed from me), I should like to see her settled in life as soon as maybe. There has been already a little something—one can hardly call it an attachment—between her and a young gentleman at this college, which has been broken off in a very sad and sudden manner by his untimely death. It is clear to me, from the dear girl's behaviour, that it never had any real root, which is, so far, a

source of satisfaction both to your aunt and myself. But I am not easy in my mind about her, and should be greatly pleased to be quit of my responsibilities, could it be done with happiness to herself. There is a young man here who has greatly taken my fancy. He has neither birth nor fortune to recommend him; as to the former, indeed, I doubt whether he is even legitimate, which in a woman's eyes is a sad blot (they never can understand, till it is too late, the immense advantage of having no connections by marriage); but as to the latter, I am much mistaken if his brains, which are abundant and of the practical sort, do not soon supply him with income. There would, of course, be many objections to such a match; but the fact is I was put (unreasonably as it turns out) in such a state of trepidation concerning the other young gentleman (now in Paradise), that I am still tremulous about the choice Sophy may make when she comes to

be her own mistress, and would rather see her mated with a man in whom I have confidence, though otherwise not very eligible, than trust to her own judgment. However, nothing happens but the unexpected, and Sophy may choose the counterpart of yourself, and thereby console me for your coldness towards her. I am sorry to say that the dear girl's health, though she is in excellent spirits, gives us some cause for uneasiness.

'Dr. Newton ascribes it to a life of idleness without an object, and says nothing would be so good for her as to marry some steady stay-at-home young fellow, to whom (think of that, Master Robert) he predicts she would prove the best of wives.

'You will be glad to hear (since all that pleases me pleases you, I know) that the Concordance goes on bravely. I find Mr. Adair (the young man I have alluded to) quite invaluable as an assistant, and the more so since his tastes are mathematical and his

appreciation of the Bard not so intense as to carry him off his feet. He will rise in life (or I'm a Dutchman); but it will not be to the Empyrean; as the American gentleman replied to his friend when he said it was "fine overhead," "there are, however, very few people going that way." But I can now no more; "the Parting Sun beyond the earth's green cape and verdant isles Hesperian sets." In other words, the bell is going for evening chapel. Adieu, dear boy. "Be strong, live happy, and love. But, first of all, Him Whom to love is to obey; and keep His great command."'

A characteristic epistle enough; full of tenderness and of that sort of humour which is the disinfectant of coarseness, and concluding with a quotation from his poetic idol.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OPPORTUNITY.

As the Concordance advanced, the originator of that great work and his young assistant saw more and more of one another, and, as was natural, became more confidential. It was not unusual with them to pass some hours of the evening together, which the scholar, who had small taste for 'wines' or other undergraduate entertainments, was very willing to spend in that way—not so much (as has been observed of him) from devotion to the Bard as to his own interests. In the long vacation time they were thrown still more together, and it was the Canon's habit when he went to chapel to leave his door 'unsported,' so that in case of Adair's coming

first from the sacred edifice, or of himself being detained, the young scholar might enter his rooms and set to work at once. A door in college has more significance than a door elsewhere. At the first sight of it you can tell whether the friend you come to visit is at home to the world or not; in the former case it is technically called 'unsported,' and I am sorry to say (for in this truthful record one must needs tell all) that Sophy, carried away by her high spirits, before she had learnt to love not wisely but too well, had spoken of her guardian's usually open door as 'unsported from the world.' On the evening when we found the Canon writing to his son, Adair came after chapel to his employer's rooms, and found admittance to them as usual in his absence.

It was as noble a lodging as Trinity could boast of, and none, with liberty to open the huge portfolios and take down the splendid books (on which, to say truth, the owner

had spent what he was wont to term playfully 'a pretty penny,' but was, in fact, more than his means quite justified) had need to complain of finding time heavy on his hands. Adair, however, had seen the Canon's art treasures more than once, and had already given them as much of his admiration as he judged would satisfy their proprietor; for himself, neither engravings nor photographs had any attractions, while the Canon's love of busts and statuettes seemed to him as childish as any passion for marbles of another kind. Books he looked upon—as, in truth, do many men—merely as means to an end. Even for science he had no taste, but only a 'turn;' he found it more convenient to work in that groove than in any other. He had put himself into the mathematical mill to be ground into a Fellow of his college, just as a docile, but not particularly learned, pig might take a header into a sausage-machine. It was his wont, therefore, when finding himself alone

in his patron's rooms, to waste no time in improving his mind by art or literature, but to sit down to his work at once, with that phlegmatic indifference which is so often mistaken for duty.

On the present occasion, however, his attention was diverted. The Canon's habits, as are those of most men of his class, were careless, and, unless where his particular hobbies were concerned, unmethodical. He left his personal jewellery on his dressing-table and his money everywhere; and he never locked anything up because he was so apt to lose his keys. In his haste to go to chapel he had thrust his letter to his son into the drawer of his desk, but had omitted to close the drawer, and there it lay. The date and address upon the top of it showed what it was at the first glance. A gentleman would at once have closed the drawer, not to avoid any temptation of looking at the letter, but to keep it from prying eyes; a nervous man,

of weak character, would have done the like to prevent the suspicion of having himself taken advantage of such a circumstance. But there are all sorts of people in the world, and some of them have an insuperable weakness for reading other people's letters. Fools do it from vulgar curiosity (I once caught a gentleman—a gentleman's gentleman—employed in endeavouring to decipher my own private correspondence; he might as well have tackled a Chaldee MS.—for no man writes so ill as I write—but his interest in the matter was most absorbing); intelligent persons, like the First Napoleon, do it with the intention of gleaning some information that may be of advantage to them. Mr. John Adair was of the latter class.

The very best way of thoroughly understanding a man's character, as we learn from all biographies, is to peruse his private letters; and it was most important to Mr. Adair to get at the back of the Canon's mind.

He did not hesitate, therefore, for an instant; indeed, he had no time to spare, since his patron might appear at any moment, but sat down and addressed himself to the interesting task at once. It was a long letter, and he could only give a divided attention to it, because he had to listen for approaching footsteps; but the stairs without were uncarpeted, so that they would give good warning, and the mind, as we are told, is 'dual.' It was only necessary to take care (for autobiography is always attractive) not to get too much absorbed. At first there was not the least danger of this occurrence; the Canon's expression of affection for his absent son, his aspirations for their reunion, 'the trivial fond records' of parental love only excited the scholar's contempt; it was incomprehensible to him that a grown man should maunder on so at the risk of having to pay a double postage fee. But presently he came upon the part which referred to Sophy;

how anxious the writer was to find a suitable match for her as soon as might be, since all hope of his Robert's union with her was at an end. 'A pretty thing, indeed!' was Adair's reflection. 'A guardian wanting to make his ward his daughter-in-law because she was an heiress!' His sense of propriety was shocked. Then there was the reference to Perry, in which again the Canon's sentiments and his own were quite at variance. Whether the attachment in question had had 'any real root' or not was a question he was in no position to decide, since it was neither a square root nor a cube root; but as to there having been only 'a little something' between them, he was of a very different opinion.

It was no mere flirtation that had induced the girl to give Perry a nocturnal meeting in the College Roundabout, when she was supposed to be at the ball, or which had emboldened the man to visit 'The Laurels' at

midnight, of which he himself had been a witness. That Miss Sophy had fooled her guardian, and probably Miss Aldred also, throughout this matter, was now quite evident; it was clear too, though the Canon had no suspicion of her, that he had his apprehensions. 'I am not easy in my mind about her,' he said; and then followed a remark which was full of interest: 'I should be greatly pleased to be rid of my responsibilities in this matter, could it be done with happiness to herself.' Really a very excellent guardian, whose wishes it behoved him by all means to further, if only they could be got to take a particular direction.

Then came some sentences on which his eyes became positively riveted, so intense was their interest for him, though he never for one instant forgot to listen for the approaching footsteps. Had they come at that moment he felt that he must obtain possession of that letter somehow and read to the end of

it, even if he had to abstract it from Her Majesty's mail. 'There is a young man here who has greatly taken my fancy,' &c. After all, there is no topic, from Shakespeare to the musical glasses, that interests the generality of human beings so much as themselves. Mr. John Adair was fairly absorbed at last. So this admirable guardian was actually inclined to think of him, John Adair, as a possible son-in-law. His expressions, indeed, were not so wholly satisfactory as they might have been; they seemed to go little further than that Miss Sophy might 'do worse,' but, upon the whole, there was very much for a young man with ambition, but no expectations, to congratulate himself upon. 'A steady stay-at-home young fellow for a husband,' was what her guardian himself recommended to Sophy, and was not that very prescription close to her hand, labelled 'John Adair,' and ready to be taken at once?

At this moment the bedroom door opened

behind him, and, to his horror and amazement, he found that he was not alone.

He made no doubt that the person who stood regarding him without a word was the Canon, and yet he did not attempt to stir or even to move his eyes from the letter spread before him; only he saw no more the words of which it was composed. There was a confused blur before his eyes and a singing in his ears, such as (he afterwards thought) might have been the precursor of some sort of fit. His ready tongue utterly failed him; his thoughts only seemed to paint for him a picture of self-wrought ruin. No explanation of his conduct was possible; and he was well aware that of all the men he knew, or could know, Canon Aldred was the very last to forgive the baseness of which he stood convicted. Nothing would have been left to him (as he afterwards reflected) but to have defied his patron; to have told him all he knew to the disadvantage of his ward, and to have

demanded hush money. Like a rat without the means of escape, despair might have driven him to even that extremity. It was, after all, not the Canon, but only Mrs. Murdoch, his bedmaker, who had been doing out his bedroom, and seeing the scholar at her master's desk, not even so much as turning his head to look at her, imagined him to be immersed in 'them papers' (notes of the divine Milton) about which 'such a blessed fuss was made, if ever her duster went anigh 'em.'

'Lor, Mr. Hadair,' she said, 'how pale and 'aggard you do look! I never see a young gent look so, leastways not in a long vacation.'

The young man gave a ghastly smile, and drew a long deep breath. Her words, though devoid of aspirates, were the sweetest he had yet heard from the lips of woman.

'That reminds me,' he said, carelessly closing the drawer, and drawing his own

MSS. around him, 'that I have never given you anything towards your annual holiday, Mrs. Murdoch. I heard the Canon saying that it was to be Ipswich this time.'

'Thank you kindly, sir,' answered the good lady, dropping a curtsey, the depth of which certified to the liberality of the donation. 'Hipswich it is this year, where I goes to see my Haugustus; it was Norwich last year, to my niece Jemima. I takes 'em turn and turn about. I wish you your Fellowship most heartily,' she added, with a turn of her elbow as if emptying a drinking-vessel, 'leastways, unless, as is like enough, you have some fair young lady in your mind, which is the best sort of fellowship after all. They talks of ladies' colleges and what not, but it's my belief——'

What were Mrs. Murdoch's views concerning the severance of the sexes were never divulged—which was a pity, for, to judge by the humorous twinkle in her eyes, they

should have been worth hearing—for just at that moment steps were heard upon the stairs.

The bedmaker bustled out with an air of unceasing occupation, pursued for its own sake without fee or reward, and the Canon and Mr. Mavors entered.

Adair, as his custom was when the Canon brought home a friend with him, at once put together his papers; on this occasion he was very willing to get away—to think over the information he had just acquired, and shape his course in accordance with it. When a great stroke of good fortune happens to us, away from home, we are glad to get back to our dear ones to impart it to them. John Adair's home was, as the phrase goes, 'under his hat,' or, rather, his college cap, and his dear ones were in the singular number.

'You've been as busy as a bee, I see, as usual,' said the Canon, approvingly; 'or, rather, *with* the B's.'

'Nay, sir, I'm at the C's.'

'Indeed! Well, well, to-morrow morning we will begin our voyage on them. Good evening.'

The Tutor and the scholar had interchanged only a nod of recognition. When the latter had gone, the Canon broke out into a eulogy of his young assistant, to which the other listened with a very incredulous air.

'You may say what you like,' said the Canon, who did not fail to observe this; 'but that young man will make his way in the world.'

'I made no observation about him whatever, that I am aware of,' said the Tutor, drily. 'As to making his way in the world, if he fails in it, it will not be, I should say, for want of pushing; and if any one falls in the scramble, he will not show the generosity of the horse in declining to put his foot on him.'

'Upon my word, Mavors, I think you

are the most prejudiced man I ever came across in all my life.'

'It's a great distinction,' said the Tutor.

'Just because the poor boy knows nothing of Plato,' continued the Canon, indignantly.

'Plato!' exclaimed the Tutor, roused to wrath in his turn by this contemptuous allusion to his idol. 'He knows nothing of anything, so far as I can see, except figures; a mere calculating machine: I dare say he can compile a Concordance.'

This was hitting the Canon in his very tenderest part—a by-blow at the divine Milton.

'Well, at all events, the few things he does know he knows thoroughly—as, indeed, I do myself; and when I hear the people who know everything talk of the things that I know, I sometimes wonder whether they know anything.'

The Tutor burst into a roar of laughter.

'That's extremely good, Aldred; I

should like to have said that to Whewell. But you don't mean to tell me that this young scholar of yours understands one line of Milton beyond his own reference to it.'

'Well, I really think he is getting on with him. His powers of memory are something marvellous; he has got all the *Liber Elegiarum* and *Silvarum Liber* (except the Greek) by heart. Just think of the quantities!'

'Yes,' returned the other; 'and just think of the mess of the "quantities" that he would make if he attempted to recite them.'

An observation which did not fail to tickle the Canon in his turn. For happy thoughts to him were scrip and share, and strokes of humour more than cent. per cent., and anger with his friend so brief a madness that it resembled summer lightning followed by a roar. So these two old friends sat down and lit their pipes, and talked together, heart bared to heart; except, indeed, that in the

Tutor's case there was something hidden in his heart from his fellow, partly from doubt of what kind of reception it would meet with, partly because his mind was not made up as to whether it was really in his heart or not.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISCOVERY.

If Cambridge in the long vacation does not quite look as Jeannette said it did, 'as though the plague was in it,' it looks deserted enough. Mr. Mavor's fancy picture of Paradise, 'a University without the Undergraduates,' is certainly not an attractive one save to a college tutor. There are plenty of young men about; but, though attired for the most part in the very selfsame garments as the *alumni* of the place, they have not a collegiate bearing. They are, in fact, Gyps in their masters' clothes. The silence, where there was wont to be so much of sound, is portentous. From the college chapels comes

no more the roar that 'shakes the Prophets blazoned on their panes;' the air is hushed upon the river, where a thousand voices used to strain their throats, a thousand feet, or rather (not to fall into Macaulay's error), two thousand, to thunder along the quaking banks. From the churches the iron hours are clanged with deafening violence; but between whiles all is mute. On the other hand, some sounds unheard in the tumult of the term make themselves audible: the coo of the pigeons in the courts, the silver leap of the fountain in the quadrangle, make dreamy music.

As Adair left the Canon's rooms, his solitary footstep in the cloisters wakened ghostly echoes, but no thoughts in consonance with them. If they touched his fancy at all, it was to remind him that he was alone in the world, dependent upon himself, and himself only, for the shaping of his fortunes. He took the same road as he had taken with Sophy on

the procession night, and as he passed the Roundabout it came into his mind that fortune might lie closer to his hand than it had ever done to undergraduate before. To most men college is but a training-ground to prepare them for the struggle of life; but in his case it was quite possible that he might reach harbour when others were but setting sail. Though very deficient in imagination, Adair was not without ambition, while under a veil of modesty he concealed a self-confidence approaching to arrogance. If only he could have his chance—that is, find himself in possession of capital—he flattered himself he could use it, not only to great advantage, but with a success that could be attained only by one in a thousand. He had really 'a good head for figures,' and he imagined himself to possess a genius for finance, and burnt for an opportunity to display it. Sophy's twenty thousand pounds, could he but obtain the use of it, seemed to him a sufficient fulcrum with

which to move the world and set it rolling to his feet. The girl, too, was attractive to him upon her own account, but by no means such an object of desire as she had been. His *amour propre* was deeply wounded by her conduct towards him since Herbert Perry's death. He had a shrewd suspicion that, although she had compromised herself with the man in some way, she had not really cared for him. Her behaviour to himself on the evening when he had dined at 'The Laurels' had led him to hope that she was not insensible to his own merits. Yet, now that his rival had been removed, so far from giving him the slightest sign of encouragement, she studiously avoided him. He knew this for certain—for he had a friend at court, procured, like most court friends, by purchase—who had told him as much.

This informant was no other than Sophy's confidante and waiting-maid. Jeannette was no traitress, but from the first moment that

Adair's gold had touched her palm she had become his well-wisher ; his contrast (in the way of open-handedness) to Perry, and his obvious dislike of him, had greatly recommended him to the girl, who said to herself again and again, 'Now, if it had not been for that mad marriage of my young mistress, how much better a husband would this young man have made her!' no doubt she also reflected, 'and how much more liberal a master would he have been to me!' But, to do her justice, this was quite a secondary consideration. The picture of Sophy's probable future had filled her with pity for her mistress ; to be mated with a clown, and a mean clown, would, she well understood, be a fate almost intolerable to her ; and her joy, as we have seen, when fate had destroyed this tyrant in embryo, she took little pains to conceal. Her aspiration, 'I wish he was drownded,' when he had left them at the mill, filled her with a certain awe

when it became accomplished, and doubtless increased the horrors of her visit to Green Street. But she suffered no real remorse in consequence. She had disliked the man from the first ; and though, as has been said, she had a strong turn for intrigue (not in the French sense ; she was only like the majority of her class—a match-maker), she had opposed Sophy's secret marriage with all her might. Now that her young mistress was once more free, she thought that she could do better for her, which Adair had also convinced her would be doing better for herself. Without, we repeat, having become deserving of the name of traitress, she had become a purchased partisan. More than once since Perry's death Adair had seen her, and quickened her resolves to aid him. But she had done her best in vain.

The fact was, the young scholar had few attractions for Sophy, and she had re-

sented exceedingly the use he had made of his knowledge of her relations with Perry. She knew too well what it was to be under another's thumb not to recognise, in his attempt to take advantage of that fact, the first turn of the screw. Since Perry's death it was true that Adair had been careful not to attempt to apply that instrument; but since he must have known (though not so well as she) how little leverage was now left in it, she did not give him much credit for his forbearance. There was little doubt in Adair's mind that she was now purposely avoiding him; a circumstance that irritated him exceedingly, but which he knew not how to remedy. Until the late revelation of the Canon's sentiments towards himself, he had, indeed, almost begun to despair of any success with Sophy; but now hope once more awoke within him. He would have much preferred to win her upon his own merits; but so that he did win her, even at second hand—*i.e.*

through the influence of a third person—he would be well content.

Musing deeply upon this matter, as he only allowed himself to muse when in the open air—for when in his own rooms his studies (on which, if he missed this short cut to fortune, all depended) claimed his undi vided attention—he turned back into the town. Many of the shops were shut, not from the lateness of the hour, but from lack of their usual customers. And the dim, half-lighted streets suited well with his thoughtful humour. In one of them, not a main thoroughfare, there was a furniture shop, the contents of which were half displayed upon the pavement. He paused in that aimless way which is natural to persons similarly self-involved, and ran his eye over the various objects exposed for sale.

In one corner was a little heap of articles placed by themselves—a small sliding book-holder, two or three sporting pictures in

flashy frames, an inkstand and a blotting-pad.

It struck him that he wanted the book-holder, and he inquired the price of it.

The proprietor, a rough, red-bearded man, whose eyes shone keen as a ferret's in the flaring glassless gas, ran out to him at once, like a spider who sees a fly in his net.

'Well, sir, I don't want to sell it alone,' he said; 'the whole lot, you will observe, are ticketed together at an uncommonly low figure; they are just the things to furnish a young gent's rooms with who wishes to do it on the cheap.'

And he looked at the young scholar, whose apparel boasted of neither scarf-pin nor watch-chain, as though he thought it probable that he might have a frugal mind.

I am neither a freshman nor a fool, my man,' returned Adair, by no means pleased with the accuracy of the other's diagnosis. 'I wouldn't have such pictures at a gift.'

'Every man to his taste,' returned the shopkeeper, indifferently; 'they were the property of a young college gentleman recently deceased, who held his head up pretty high, I can tell you. If you're not a freshman, you must have heard talk enough in your time of Mr. Perry, of Trinity.'

'Oh, those were Mr. Perry's, were they?' said Adair, unable to exclude from his tone a sudden access of interest.

'You knew him, sir, I see. Well, even as a memento, these little things should have some attraction for you; and they're dirt cheap.'

Adair was passing the highly-coloured pictures in review—'The Meet,' 'The Find,' 'Full Cry,' &c. Then he took up the blotting-pad, which was of tartan, uniform with the inkstand and book-holder, and as he fluttered the leaves his hand suddenly began to shake.

'All as good as new,' urged the dealer. 'The poor young gent was not much of a

reading man, nor yet of a writing man; a first-rate oar and a good swimmer—yet he was drownded.'

'I think I'll take the inkstand and the slider,' said Adair, 'if, as you say, they will be cheap.'

'And the blotter, too,' said the man; 'I can't spoil the set; though, as for the pictures, perhaps I may sell them separate. Let us say five-and-twenty shillings.'

'Very good; here is my card,' said Adair; 'send them round to my rooms to-morrow morning; but as for the blotter—as it happens, I want a blotter, so I'll just take that home with me.'

And he tucked the thing under his arm, where it was hidden in the folds of his college gown.

Mr. John Adair was not a man to throw five-and-twenty shillings away for nothing, though up to this time he had given much more to Miss Jeannette (*née* Jenny) Perkins

for next kin to it. He walked away very well satisfied with his bargain. If it had been a jewel-case and Trumpington Street a Tiger's Bay (a favourite haunt of two-legged tigers in East London) he could not have hugged it tighter. Mr. Herbert Perry, as the dealer said, had held his head up pretty high in Cambridge—in other words, had been a local celebrity. It was therefore no wonder that, having found an autograph letter of his in the blotting-pad, Mr. John Adair should feel a little triumphant; his personal acquaintance (though it had been but slight) with that ill-fated young gentleman no doubt gave it an additional interest. Perhaps, in a strictly legal sense, the letter could be scarcely said to belong to him, but was the property of the dead man's literary executors; but I suppose no autograph collector was ever hindered from possessing himself of a MS. by any delicate scruple of that sort. Again, it might have been urged that a blotting-book, even

though its proprietor was deceased, was rather a private matter, and that what was left in it of personal memoranda should be held as something sacred. But this consideration could hardly be expected to weigh much with a gentleman who had already made free with his patron's account-book, and still more recently with his domestic correspondence. No; I contend, upon Mr. John Adair's behalf, that there is neither an autograph collector, nor a diplomatist, living, who would not have behaved as he did; his only doubt in the matter (as would have happened in their case) was connected with the document itself. Was the letter he had discovered genuine? It was, in fact, only the fragment of a letter, with neither heading nor signature; and evidently, from the frequent erasures and alterations, a rough copy. It was very short, so that Adair had already made himself master of its meaning, and, folding it carefully away, had placed it in his pocket.

What he had read filled him with amazement. If it had really been written by Herbert Perry it was impossible to exaggerate its probable importance to himself; and such was his excitement and impatience that he was determined to resolve his doubts at once. He therefore bent his steps to the house in Green Street where, as he knew, the dead man had lodged, and rang the bell.

Mrs. Aylett answered it in person. Her lodger's death had of course left his rooms upon her hands, and being of economical habits, she had dismissed her serving-girl, or 'slavey' (as such domestics are called in Cambridge), and superintended all matters of the house herself. Her face was almost as lugubrious as when Jeannette had last beheld it; but it was not now so much regret for the dead which touched it with melancholy, as apprehension on her own account. It was just possible, after so lamentable an occurrence had happened under her roof, that she might

have some difficulty in finding another lodger. Adair, who knew what it was to confront a problematical future, took in the situation at a glance.

'These are the lodgings, I believe, occupied by the late Mr. Perry?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are they taken yet for the October term?'

'Why, no, sir, not exactly taken. I have had several communications about them; being central and convenient, they are naturally much sought after.'

'Just so; I should like to look at them. It is not for myself, but for a young friend of mine whose parents have commissioned me to select rooms for him next term. It is a little late, I am afraid, to come on such an errand.'

'Not at all, sir, not at all; pray walk up. The curtains are drawn, but I will have the gas lit in a moment. This is the sitting-room'—she went on, volubly, as she put a

match to the chandelier—'there is not a more cheerful one in Cambridge, though I say it who shouldn't say it.'

'It strikes me as a little bare.'

'So it does, sir. But a good deal of new furniture will be coming in. Mr. Perry's father disposed of all that belonged to the poor young gentleman to a dealer, which, to my mind was not a pretty thing to do.'

'Nor to mine. I hope he left you a memento or two, however.'

'Not a stick, sir; the least said about that the better.'

'Quite true; I knew your late lodger myself, and I fancy his father and he did not pull very well together. There were debts and things.'

'So there might have been; but still one's flesh and blood should go for something. A father might surely have left something to his son's landlady.'

The reason seemed a little indirect, but

Adair admitted it with sympathetic fervour. 'I am sorry,' he added, 'for both our sakes, since I should have liked to have purchased some little thing that belonged to poor Perry if you could have spared it. That's the bedroom, is it? Very comfortable, I'm sure; and the terms seem reasonable enough. Of course, I can't say "yes" on behalf of my young friend, but I will recommend the rooms with pleasure; and in case of approval I will let you know. What is this stuck in the looking-glass? A note of the bumps made on the river?'

'Yes, sir, a memorandum of poor Mr. Perry's. You know how wrapped up he was in boating matters.'

'Just so; it's very characteristic. Perhaps you would allow me to purchase it.'

'You can have it with all my heart, sir. Little he thought, when he jotted down those few lines, that they would be the last, poor fellow, he would ever write; leastways,

except perhaps that letter as was never found.'

'What letter?'

'Well, sir, a letter as he wrote to his father the very day of his death. It was on his desk—that I'll swear to; and Liza took it to the post; at least that's my belief still, though the girl stuck to it as she never meddled with it. But when I happened to mention it to his father, the old gentleman said he never received the letter.'

'Could any one else have taken it?'

'Why no, sir; why should they, except to post it? Unless, indeed, it was mere curiosity, which I should be loth to think of anybody, though the men as brought the poor young gentleman home were anything but well behaved, and spiled the stair carpet with their wet boots, and wanted gin *ad libitum* because of their sad errand.'

'And nobody but those men entered the room?'

'No, sir, nobody; except, indeed, a young woman from Canon Aldred's. Miss Aldred, his sister, had known poor Mr. Perry, it seems, and sent some flowers. No, no; it was Liza, no doubt. She took the letter from the desk to put it in the post, and then dropped it into the kennel, careless slut!'

'I dare say that was it, Mrs. Aylett. Here is something in exchange for the memorandum.'

'Oh, sir, five shillings is too much.'

'Not at all. Such things are not to be estimated by what they will fetch. I wish you good-night and a good *let*.'

'Thank you, sir, thank you. I wish it was yourself as was coming to occupy your poor friend's rooms. I'm sure he will be pleased up yonder if he is permitted to know the interest you take in him.'

Adair walked away without reply. Speculations upon a future state, since they

could never be verified, had generally no interest for him; but he did experience a twinge at those last words of Mrs. Aylett's. He thought it very unlikely that his purchase of that memorandum of the 'bumps' upon the river would be known to Mr. Perry's departed spirit; but if it was known, he felt that it would by no means afford him satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'THE EXEAT.'

ADAIR was a man who had few visitors; but as soon as he reached his rooms he 'sported his oak,' and shut out all possible comers. The investigation he was about to make was as delicate as momentous. First, he made sure that there was nothing more in the blotting-pad that he had purchased, save the mere leaves, and also that on them there was no impress of written words which could throw any light upon the matter in hand. Then he compared most carefully the memorandum he had taken from the dead man's mirror with the handwriting of the letter found in the book. Making allowance for the fact that one

was executed with the haste and inattention to caligraphy peculiar to a 'rough copy,' and the other was a list of references, probably written with some care, he felt confident that they were by the same hand. As for the contents of the letter, they were of such importance to a certain young lady as to account for her taking any steps to prevent them reaching the eye of the person for whom it was intended; and of the step that had been taken he could make a shrewd guess. Although deficient in imagination, Adair had a logical mind; he could follow a chain of reasoning (and therefore much more one of facts) link by link; and the conclusion he arrived at was that the letter of which Mrs. Aylett had spoken (the original of which he now held in his hand) had been stolen by Jeannette at the instance of her young mistress. He did not believe that it was Miss Aldred who had sent those flowers; it had been one far nearer to the dead man than she, though they were sent

for anything but sentimental reasons. It had been all a ruse to get possession of that compromising letter; and it had succeeded. So far Sophy's whole proceedings were as plain to him as if he had been a witness of them.

And those of the dead man were equally clear. Composition had been a difficult matter with him; and it is probable that he had written more than one copy of so momentous a communication before he had got it to his mind. The rest he had no doubt destroyed; but this one had escaped his attention and the search of others. How thankful Miss Sophy ought to be that it had fallen into such safe hands as his! This was the letter:—

'As to your proposition' (a word poor Perry had spelt right, probably from his loving acquaintance with Euclid) 'of my going to Australia, that is put out of the question, father, by a circumstance which I am about to tell you, and which will astonish you very much. I am a married man. You will at

once exclaim, "some barmaid;" but it is not a barmaid at all, I do assure you. It is a young lady of good possition, and *an Hairess.* She has twenty thousand golden sovs. of her own, or will have when she comes of age, which will be in less than twelve months. This is pretty well, I think, for the "disgrace to the family." The whole matter is at present a secret: you will perhaps say, "that means a lie;" but you will only have to look in the register of St. Anne's Church when you are next in the City, and you will find that it is all right. She is very anxious to keep it quiet till she attains her majority. I should not have told you of all this but for your last letter, which has compelled me to make a clean breast of it; and it is quite contrary to my wife's wishes—think of my having a wife! how funny it sounds!—that I do tell you. She has an uncle on whom she is in some degree dependent; and, of course, he will be awfully riled. It is for you to consider what

is best to be done; for my part, I shall be glad when the murder 's out. Under present circumstances, as you may imagine, it isn't much of a honeymoon for me. Besides this uncle, by-the-bye, Sophy (that's her name) has an aunt; but she is very fond of her, and, moreover, has given us such opportunities for meeting that for her own sake there is little doubt she will take our side. I think you will own that I have done pretty well for myself; and if you could manage to send me fifty pounds, or even five-and-twenty, which under present circumstances will of course be repaid all right, it would be a great convenience. As to taking my degree, that, of course, don't matter now one haypenny; and I don't think you'll say any more about Australia, since I've found the gold diggings at home.'

'So they had been married, had they?' mused Adair, with a cynical smile, 'those two young people.' It was no wonder then that that dull Adonis had shown so much jealousy

on Miss Sophy's account, and had also been on so very familiar a footing with her; that little excursion in the Roundabout was also explained, and the young lady's companionship at such an hour fully justified, for why should not a wedded pair walk when and where they pleased? His own suspicions as to Miss Sophy's tendency to flirtation were now shown to be as baseless as they were injurious, and everything was satisfactorily cleared up. Yes, upon the whole, as it seemed to Mr. John Adair, *most* satisfactorily.

The course which would have suggested itself to any chivalric, not to say any straightforward and honourable mind, would have been to tear this damaging letter up; and, since the young lady had contrived to avoid the disagreeable consequences of indiscretion thus far, to make her thoroughly secure. But Adair was not a Bayard. He was a man of calculation, and as he held the dead man's blotted manuscript in his hand he seemed, by

the expression of his face, to be weighing it in some imaginary scale, as though he were saying to himself, 'Now, what is this worth to me?' There are people, unable, when the opportunity occurs, to resist the laying a fellow-creature under an obligation, and who would have enclosed the letter to the young person concerned, assuring her of their respect for her secret and of the pleasure they derived from placing it in her own hands. This was, in fact, the idea that now suggested itself to the young scholar, with this trifling difference, that instead of sending the original manuscript, it struck him that it would be the better plan to send only a copy of it.

But whatever was done he felt must be done with judgment and mature deliberation, as being a thing that could not be undone.

For a long time Adair sat before his writing-table—it was of common deal with a cloth over it—with his thin chin in his

hands, thinking hard. It was a problem of a very different kind from those he had been accustomed to, and the solution was not easy. In the end, carefully putting away the dead man's letter, he stepped across the quadrangle to his tutor's rooms—the truant tutor, Mr. Prater, who had inconvenienced Mr. Mavors so much in the matter of Mr. Perry's decease. The outer door was open, and the inner had a neat little brass knocker, which he gently raised and tapped with it, as light and sharp as a woodpecker.

'Come in,' said the Tutor, a thin and rather weazened, but by no means elderly man, immersed in papers with figures on them. 'Well, Adair, what is it?' His manner was encouraging, but not genial. Adair was one of the most promising young men on his 'side,' one that would be an honour to his college in any case, and perhaps senior wrangler. Mr. Prater was proud of such a mathematical genius of course, but without

any more personal liking for him than the proprietor of Chang might have had for his giant.

'I have received news to-night, sir, which requires my absence for a few days; a communication from Haredale College.'

'I hope you will do nothing with precipitation in that quarter, Adair,' said the other, persuasively. 'In a very short time you will find yourself, I hope, in a very different position: better able to make your own terms.'

'Thank you, sir, I will be very careful; but it is necessary that I should have a personal interview with one of the authorities. Perhaps you will give me an exeat—say, to Friday. I shall go by the night train, right through.'

'It is quite unnecessary to be so precise, Mr. Adair,' observed the Tutor, smiling. 'You are not like some young gentlemen upon my side, whose "urgent private affairs" are sometimes a little problematical. You

have an excellent character to come and go upon.'

He filled up a printed form, and gave it to the young man.

'Can I do anything more for you?'

'Nothing, sir; I am much obliged.'

Except the Canon (whose regard the reader may think he had obtained on something like false pretences) and Jeannette (whose good-will had been stimulated by tips), the Tutor was the only friend the young man had in the world—a genuine one, it is true, but whose attachment was untinged with enthusiasm. In his heart, while pretending to be indifferent to it, John Adair resented this isolation, and quite ignored the fact that with the spade of selfishness he had himself dug the trench that separated him from the sympathies of his fellow-creatures. When a man tells us, 'I am poor, I am unfortunate,' we pity him; but when he adds, 'and I have not a friend in the wide world,'

we know that there is a better (or worse) reason for that than either his poverty or his misfortune.

On returning to his rooms Adair wrote a few seemingly hurried lines (which were, however, well conned) to Canon Aldred. That gentleman was aware that overtures had been made to him by the authorities of a certain rising school to become (after he should have obtained his Fellowship) its mathematical professor, and had dissuaded him against accepting them. He had told him that it would be putting his light under a bushel, and be almost tantamount to burying himself alive. It was not Adair's intention to accept them, nor had they, I am afraid, been repeated, as he had led Mr. Prater to conclude; his 'urgent private affairs,' though not of the nature at which that gentleman had slily hinted, were quite as far from what they were feigned to be; but he shrewdly concluded that this prompt course of conduct would

make the Canon solicitous about his future, tend to increase his intimacy with him, and even further certain expectations which had within the last hour or so taken a more decided shape. He had now no doubt of the genuineness of that little scrap of paper as being the farewell composition of his dead rival; and almost none of the truth of what was there narrated. Still, that naïve remark of the writer, 'The whole matter is at present a secret; you will perhaps say "that means a lie,"' gave him just a little uneasiness; and he was going up to London to take the very step which Mr. Perry senior had been advised to do, in order to make certain. Although circumstances had denied Mr. John Adair heraldic supporters and a crest, he had a motto of his own, perhaps suggested by the doctrine of chances, with which he was well acquainted, 'No risks.' He made no demonstration of it; it was not inscribed on his banner, like 'Excelsior!' nor even on his

(Britannia metal) spoons and forks; but he kept it constantly before his eyes and acted on it. An excellent maxim, too often neglected by men, and still more so by women; but needing, for its completeness, the supplementary device, 'Honesty is the best policy.' The latter axiom, from its vulgarity or inconvenience, Mr. John Adair disregarded, and took his motto neat.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE BRINK OF CONFESSION.

'In the long vacation,' it was the Canon's wont to remark, 'we breakfast a little late.'

This was true; but nevertheless calculated to give a false impression—namely, that when it was not the long vacation the Canon breakfasted early. Like most indolent men, he was, in fact, a late riser at all times. Miss Aldred, on the contrary, was up and about attending to her household affairs almost as soon as her maids. Sophy followed her guardian's example, and was always the last to put in an appearance. For the last few mornings she had been later than ever; and, indeed, now often breakfasted in her own

room. This was the case on the present occasion, so that the Canon and his sister were alone.

'So Miss Sophy has deserted us again,' he said, as he lazily cracked an egg. 'I can't think what has come to the young girls of the present day; when you were Sophy's age, Maria, you were as early a bird as you are now.'

'We must make allowance for Sophy just now, William. She is by no means well.'

'Yet she seemed so much better a few weeks back,' said the Canon.

'That is true; I don't understand it myself. But it is certain she is now as out of health, and even more so, than she was awhile ago, when we called in Dr. Newton.'

'Then call him in again. If he did her good then, why should he not do her good now?' inquired the Canon, with that impatience of indisposition which a man always

exhibits when he is not himself afflicted with it, in which case he takes quite another view.

As Miss Maria kept silence, the Canon naturally went on to pooh-pooh what he believed was nothing serious as regarded his ward, and was certain was an inconvenience as regarded himself.

'Of course, if the dear girl is not well, she must be looked to; but I don't think she should be permitted to give way to mere fads and fancies. It would be much better for her, both now and in the future, if she were to exert herself a little more; if she made the tea, for example, instead of you; paid the week's bills, and learnt by experience those domestic matters which every woman should know, and every man when he marries expects (and is in general wofully disappointed) that she does know. As to Sophy, I am quite surprised at what you tell me about her, for, to my mind, she seems in exceptionally high

spirits, which, in view of recent events, I should hardly have ventured to expect.'

'How very unobservant even the cleverest men are!' observed Aunt Maria, with a pitying smile. 'Is it possible you have not noticed, William, that those high spirits of which you speak are a little too high; that, in fact, they are forced?'

'I confess I have not,' was the blunt reply. 'I know the difference between fresh asparagus and forced asparagus; but when I see a girl chattering and laughing, and there is no reason why she shouldn't laugh and chatter, it doesn't strike me that her emotions are artificial. If she had been so merry a week or two ago, when that sad affair of poor Perry's took place, it might have aroused some suspicion of that sort; but now——' and the Canon finished his sentence by shrugging his shoulders and throwing out his hands, an action borrowed from the French, but origin-

ally derived from a frog about to take the water.

'You will be surprised, then, to hear, William, that on three several occasions, within as many days, I have come upon Sophy when she has been plunged in tears; not only weeping, but weeping with such force and passion as I have never seen except in some supersensitive child like Stevie.'

'Poor dear; why then, of course, we must send for Dr. Newton. She's a cup too low, and wants bracing—probably a tonic.'

'Perhaps,' replied Aunt Maria, doubtfully; 'but we must also remember that she has been leading a very different sort of life of late from that to which she has been accustomed. She has seen no company, had no excitement, and has even resolutely declined to go out of doors.'

'That's bad; people should take plenty of exercise—that is,' added the Canon, with a sudden consciousness of the absurdity of this

doctrine from a man who never put his foot to the ground except between Trinity and 'The Laurels,' 'young people. As to company, it is not so easy to get it during the long vacation.'

'There's Mr. Mavors,' observed Aunt Maria; 'why do you never bring him home with you as you used to do?'

'Well, I suppose because we see so much of one another in College. But what is the good of asking *him*, so far as Sophy is concerned at least? She thinks him an old fogey like myself, and he looks upon her probably as he looks upon an undergraduate upon somebody else's "side," only a trifle more ornamental.'

'If you think that, William, I can only say, over again, how very unobservant you men are. Is it possible you have never remarked how eager Mr. Mavors is to attract Sophy's attention, to sit by her, to converse with her (only the poor man has nothing to

say), and generally to make himself personally agreeable to her?'

'Now, really, my dear Maria, if you have seen *that*,' said the Canon, putting up his glasses and regarding his sister with gentle amazement, 'I believe you could see into a millstone. If you have discovered that Reginald Mavors—the man who knows more about Plato than anybody—is in love with a girl of twenty, Newton (I don't mean the doctor but Sir Isaac) was nothing to you; Columbus was nothing to you; you are the chief and queen of all discoverers.'

'I don't say Mr. Mavors is in love with Sophy, William—though the fact of her being "a girl of twenty" would be by no means an obstacle to such a phenomenon. If you fell in love yourself it would be with a girl of twenty—if she wasn't seventeen.'

'Goodness gracious!' exclaimed the Canon, taking out his handkerchief and affecting to wipe his brow, 'you have certainly a very

powerful imagination, though it strikes me as slightly morbid. You give me the creeps.'

'You may laugh at me as much as you like,' continued Miss Maria, confidently; 'but I trust to the evidence of my own eyes, and they are pretty sharp ones; and I am quite sure that Mr. Mavors only requires a little encouragement to induce him to propose to your ward. As, of course, she doesn't give it him, and never will do so, he will probably never speak; but you may be well assured the matter stands as I have stated it.'

'Dear me! Do you think Sophy is aware of his aspirations, or is it you only who are endowed with these powers of perception?'

'In love affairs, my dear William, when the love is, as in this case, on one side, it is the looker-on who sees most of the game; yet, since you ask the question, I am inclined to believe that Sophy does know that Mr. Mavors is one of her admirers.'

'You don't think she is pining for him,

do you?' inquired the Canon, drily. 'It is not that which makes her so out of sorts?'

'Of course not. If you turn everything I say into ridicule, William, it is impossible to discuss the subject. But I don't think, whatever is the matter with her, that the doctor can cure it; it is more mental than physical; besides which, she seems to have the most steadfast objection to seeing the doctor.'

'Dear me, how queer! when ever so little is the matter with me I *fly* to Newton. He gives me a bread pill, perhaps—always silvered, though; I'm particular about that—and, I dare say, a phial of coloured water; but it always does me good.'

'Yes, you see, you're a man,' said Aunt Maria, drily; 'we women are not so sensible.'

And with that parting shot, the 'little affair of outposts' ended. But it had its results. Aunt Maria's words made a greater impression on the Canon than he admitted

even to himself. He hung about the house that morning instead of going to his college rooms as usual, and, when his sister went out to market, made a point of waiting for Sophy's coming down to the drawing-room.

He noticed that she entered it with a pale face and listless step, and that the one flushed up and the other changed to a tripping gait, when she caught sight of him.

'What, uncle, *you* here!' she cried: it is possible but for his previous talk with Aunt Maria he would have observed nothing unnatural in her tone; but, as it was, it reminded him of that of an actress in a genteel comedy.

'Yes, Sophy, I *am* here,' he answered, with tender gravity, 'and mainly upon your account. Your aunt tells me sad tales of you. No appetite, no colour, no little jokes such as you were wont to make; in short, she says you're altogether out of sorts. Now, what's the matter?'

A question easy enough to put, but often very difficult to answer.

'Nothing that I know of, uncle,' replied Sophy, her cheeks suddenly grown scarlet. 'Aunt Maria is so foolishly fond of me that she exaggerates every little ailment.'

'In point of fact, then, my dear girl, it is not that there is nothing the matter with you, but that you don't know *what* is the matter with you. Now in such cases there is always a remedy made and provided; you must see the doctor.'

'Indeed, uncle, there is not the least necessity for that. I hate doctors, and besides, there is nothing for him to prescribe for.'

'What, not when you, who used to be such a walker, are disinclined for exercise, don't eat your meat, and have no relish for society, and take to moping half the day in your own room?'

'But, indeed, uncle, I am very willing to walk, only it's not very good fun to go out

with Jeannette, and you know dear Aunt Maria walks like a walking doll; she is only wound up for half a mile or so. Then as to company, why really,' here she smiled, 'I have not of late had the chance of plunging into much dissipation.'

'A very proper reproof, my dear; I'll engage some nice young man to walk with you, and ask him to dinner afterwards, then if you don't get plump and strong the doctor must be called in.'

So far matters would seem to have been arranged to their mutual satisfaction, and in token that it was so the Canon, laying his hand on her arm, stooped to kiss Sophy's forehead. As he did so, he perceived, what had before escaped his notice, that her eyes were full of tears.

Now some men—husbands especially—are proof against this feminine weakness; they see tears too often, or entertain a shrewd suspicion that they hold a purpose in them, as

amber holds a fly; but the Canon, long a widower, had forgotten these things. The unaccustomed spectacle filled him with alarm and pity. 'My dear good girl,' he exclaimed, 'what can have happened? If anything has gone amiss I conjure you to confide in me, who stand in the place of your dead father!'

The effect of this speech was amazing indeed. 'Don't speak to me like that, guardian, I am not worthy of it,' cried the unhappy Sophy, throwing herself on her knees before him. 'I am not good, as you think; I am a disobedient, false, foolish girl. Don't, don't speak to me so, for I can't bear it.'

'You are not well, my dear; you are overwrought and weak.'

'Yes, weak and wicked,' she sobbed out bitterly; 'an unworthy girl.'

'Nay, nay, nay,' said the Canon, soothingly; 'not wicked nor unworthy, of that I'm sure. You will always be our own dear Sophy.'

'I hope so, guardian; I pray that it may be so, yet I fear—I fear—that you may some day get to despise and loathe me. Oh, tell me that whatever happens you will not do that!'

'We shall certainly not do that, Sophy. We shall always love you, and never refuse you anything in reason, so long as it is for your own good. Why, who have we got to love, now that my Robert is gone, but you? It is to you we look to comfort us in our old age, and if we could only see you happily settled in life—there, there, don't cry, my darling. Whatever little thing may be the matter, it will all come right, and I know you will do your best to please us.'

'I will, I will,' she cried, still clinging to his knees. 'There is nothing I would not do to keep your love. Oh, if I only can but keep it!'

He raised her up, kissing her tenderly, and did his best to banish such imaginary and

foolish fears ; and by degrees she became calmer. But the passion to which she had been moved was hardly graver though far more tumultuous than his own emotions. What sister Maria had told him had received ample confirmation. He was convinced that there was something seriously amiss with the girl, though he attached no practical significance to her wild and wandering words. One thing, however, gave him comfort. He had gathered from what she said that she would have no objection to follow any course that he might judge to be beneficial to her ; and he was quite resolved that she should no longer shut herself up at home, and live the life of a recluse. He would make a point of getting her to meet people ; and while thinking on that matter it was small wonder that his mind reverted to John Adair, one of the few persons of her own age he knew. He did not think of him seriously as a husband for her, but he felt it would be better for all parties

(by no means excepting himself) that a girl so impressionable, and who stood in such need of ballast, should be mated, and that as soon as possible, with some one of a different disposition ; one whom he hoped too, for the poor man's own sake, whoever he might be, could stand hysterics, and so on, which did not suit him (the Canon) by any means.

He had had his supreme moments in life like the rest of us—such as his examination for his Fellowship, and the first conception of his new edition of Milton ; had had his heart wrung when his wife died, and when he parted from his only son ; but such an interview as that which he had just passed through was something altogether out of his experience. He was very sorry for Sophy, though he deemed her grief as imaginary as her apprehensions of losing the affection of her friends ; but the most lasting impression left upon his mind was his own incapacity to deal with her. No doubt Newton had been right when awhile

ago he had recommended that the girl should be settled in life, and given other things to think about, when all these caprices and megrims would disappear. He would just look in on Newton as he went into town, and ask him to keep an eye upon Sophy without her actually consulting him professionally. He would ask the doctor to dinner, not alone, for fear of arousing her suspicions, but with a few others—Frederic Irton, for example, who was staying for a week with the Helfords. And in the meantime, there should be always somebody—Adair or Mavors—to break the monotony of the evening for her. Adair had been away since Monday night, much to the Canon's annoyance; the chariot-wheels of the Concordance were delayed in consequence, and besides he missed the young man's society; but he was returning to Cambridge that very day, and should be asked to dine with the rest.

CHAPTER XXV.

ENMESHED AGAIN.

In all the sombre records of criminal literature there is nothing to my mind more interesting than the following words written in Newgate prison by a clergyman condemned for murder. It is now nearly a hundred years ago since they were penned, but his reflections are as just as when they were fresh.

'How many of my fellow-creatures, with everything to make them otherwise, are miserable at this moment! It is their hour of dinner; the meat is done too little or too much. The servant has broken something; some friend (as the phrase goes) does not make his appearance, and consequently is not

eye-witness of the unnecessary dishes which the family pretends to afford, or some friend drops in unexpectedly, and surprises the family on short commons.

'Ye home-made wretches! ye ingenious inventors of ills! before ye suffer yourselves to be soured and made miserable for the whole remainder of the day by some trifle or another, which does not deserve the name of accident, look here on me! Peep through my grate. Look at my cell. Then go and quarrel with your wives, your children, or your guests, and call Almighty God to witness that you of all men are the most miserable.'

This is a sermon that has lost none of its force, and Sophy Perry (for such, as we know, was her true name) could have now preached it out of her own bitter experience. All that had gone before in her life, and there had been much of late of misery and apprehension, was as nothing compared with the wretchedness of her present condition; and it was

rendered more poignant by the fact that a few weeks ago she had thought herself free from the consequences of her folly. To return to the case of the poor wretch in the condemned cell, it was as though he had been promised, nay, had received, a free pardon, and now it was annulled, and he was once more doomed to die upon the morrow. The words of her dead husband with which he taunted her at the mill, within a few hours of his violent end, now rang in her ears.

'Suppose this or that should occur when I was away in Australia, it would be very awkward, I mean for *you*.'

He had said 'awkward' in his rough way; but he might have said ruinous. And yet it would not have been so ruinous then, as circumstances stood, as it would be now. For the first time since her husband's death she wished that he could be recalled to life.

In her distress and agony of mind, it seemed amazing to her as it did to the con-

vict in his cell, that human beings should worry themselves, and be troubled about ordinary misfortunes. She envied the kitchen-maid she met upon the stairs, the very char-woman that came to help in the scullery—nay, the very beggar woman that called for broken meat, and, above all, she envied Henny Helford; Henny, whose lover had come down from town to see her, and whose existence, in its atmosphere of truth and love, seemed to be that of an angel. 'Oh, liar and fool that I was!' was now her bitter cry; and well might she have added, 'nay, that I *am*.'

There had been a moment, when she felt her guardian's loving hand laid upon her shoulder, and his fatherly lips upon her forehead, in which she had almost told him all; but false shame had restrained her. Like some embezzling clerk, who has an opportunity of making a clean breast of it to a kind and considerate employer, she might have relieved her mind of its terrible burden, and found pardon

and safety; but she had preferred to go on concealing her delinquencies by fresh frauds. She had not only been on her knees, but in her heart had felt the most genuine penitence for her duplicity, yet she had suffered that opportune moment to escape, and deliberately chosen the same path of secrecy and deception that had already led her to so sad a pass. If the Erring would only be persuaded that every slip and fall should be treated as a wise merchant treats a bad debt—if they would confess it and forget it, and start free, instead of sending their good money after bad—how much happier would be this world of ours!

It was now three days ago since she had received a certain letter, with a northern postmark, to the following effect:—

'Dear Miss Gilbert,—My reason for addressing you you will find in the enclosed rough draft of a letter, which I have reason to believe never reached its destination. I came

upon it by accident this morning in a blotting-book bought at second-hand, belonging to a member of my college, lately deceased; and I lose not a moment in putting you in possession of it. In all human probability, no eye but my own has ever seen it. I need not tell you that I know how to keep the secrets of those I respect; and when you have destroyed it, you may regard it as never having existed. I am detained here upon business for a few days, but on my return to Cambridge shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you.—Yours most faithfully,

'JOHN ADAIR.'

The enclosure was the rough copy of her husband's letter to his father, which she had destroyed without reading it, but the original of which she recognised at once. A mercenary, coarse communication enough, announcing his union to her without the pretence of any gratification in it, save for the

fortune it conferred upon him, and which his greedy fingers were evidently eager to clutch. If she had had any illusion still left concerning him—the least hope that his love for her might have been reawakened—this would have been quite sufficient to dispel them: but she had had none. His words humiliated her, but had no power to give her pain. What shocked her, terrified her, and had dragged her down from that height of fancied security to the lowest depth was that other letter, which ever since its receipt she had carried about in her bosom, where it lay like an asp —Adair's letter. It was not only that it showed all her precautions had been useless, and that the secret she had striven to keep with such pains and loss of self-respect was no more her own; but the terms of his communication were also terrible. Between those quiet matter-of-fact lines she read—only too clearly—a fixed intention. He had reminded her of his ability to keep a secret (with refer-

ence, doubtless, to his having seen her with Mr. Perry when she was supposed to be at the ball); and she remembered how unmercifully he had used his knowledge, or rather how he had only been restrained from using it, by her pretence of kindness for him. Above all, the calculating coolness with which he had written, 'On my return to Cambridge, I shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you,' appalled her; for she knew he felt that she dared not deny herself to him. From henceforth she would be at this man's beck and call, as she had been at the other's. She had thought herself a free woman; but she had, in fact, only exchanged masters.

And yet she had not dared to tell the Canon! A year ago she would have cut the knot of such a trouble at any sacrifice; but the practice of deceit, like that of any other vice, soon becomes habitual: not only do the moral objections to it disappear, but it seems the most natural course to follow. An honest

nature is like a steam-ship which goes straight to its object; but when it adopts shifty ways the fires are put out, and it becomes a sailing-vessel of the most indifferent kind, the sport of every wind and tide.

Poor Sophy had, indeed, her comforter, and one of a more cheery sort than those whom Job had, in her waiting-maid. Jeannette did not remind her how she had once warned her young mistress 'not to boast,' nor, under pretence of sympathy, did she expatiate upon her misery, as it is the habit of her class to do. She took a practical view.

'Well, Miss Sophy' (she always ignored the fact of her mistress's marriage even when they were alone), 'things look bad, no doubt; but they might be much worse.'

'Worse,' murmured the unhappy girl, like an echo from some tottering ruin; 'how could they be worse?'

'Well, ma'am, you might have been so

situated that you *must* have told the Canon, or got somebody to marry you *offhand*, to save your character.'

With a flush and a shiver like one in a fever, poor Sophy moaned acquiescence. Untoward fate had certainly shown some mercy to her in that one particular; but the stress Jeannette had placed upon the word 'offhand' disquieted her. It seemed to suggest that marriage at some time or another, though not perhaps immediately, was the only way out of the difficulty even now.

'Don't talk of marriage,' she exclaimed, with bitterness. 'I will never, never marry again.'

'Never is a long day, Miss Sophy,' said Jeannette, cheerfully. 'One says the same when people dies. "We shall never, never forget them;" yet, somehow, one gets over it.'

'I *hate* men,' continued Sophy, fiercely—'a cowardly, false, greedy race.'

'They're all that, Miss, no doubt; yet life would be dull without 'em.'

'I don't mind dulness; I desire it. Oh,' she moaned, as if in physical pain, 'oh, for my last year of life again!'

'Why, bless me, Miss. Sophy, one would think you were on your death-bed! If you did have it back you would be sure to do something foolish; it's only natural. What's the good of crying over spilt milk. Wipe it up, and start afresh. What is it that makes you so harsh with this Mr. Adair? He couldn't help finding Mr. Perry's letter; and, having found it, what was the poor young man to do? If he had said he had torn it up you wouldn't have believed him.'

'No, not upon his oath I wouldn't,' was the energetic reply.

'Well, there it is, you see; hit high, hit low, he can't please you.' (It was an unfortunate metaphor under the circumstances; but, like a good many other folk, Miss Jean-

nette Perkins used quotations as they came to hand, without much regard to their meaning.) 'He has sent you the original document, which, if he had wished to frighten you with anything, he could have kept and held over you. There's many a one as would have done *that*, you may depend upon it.'

'I dare say,' sighed the unhappy Sophy. Her faith in male nature was at its lowest; to her mind all men were tyrants, and all women, who were not wise and prudent, their slaves. Still, this last view of the matter did give her a little comfort. It was really something in Adair's favour that he had given up the compromising MS.

'By-the-bye, I do hope, Miss Sophy, as you have burnt the thing.'

'Why should I burn it?' she answered, desperately; 'what is the use of taking precautions? What has resulted from them in my case? What has come of all my falsehoods and deceits, and theft—for I have even

stooped to that—why nothing, except exposure.'

'As to theft, Miss Sophy,' returned the waiting-maid, earnestly, 'if you mean the taking Mr. Perry's letter, that was *my* work, not yours, and I am quite ready to bear the responsibility of it: I didn't like the job at the time, but there was no actual harm in it. A dead man's letter, about a matter that can never take place, can be scarcely considered property. And as to exposure, you must permit me to say that you are rather ungrateful to hint at such a thing; for nothing of the kind has happened. A certain gentleman has by an unfortunate circumstance been admitted into your confidence, that's all.'

To judge by poor Sophy's face, that '*all*' appeared to comprehend a good deal; but she only shook her head, and answered nothing. In her heart of hearts she already felt herself in the toils. She knew that Adair had formed an attachment for her, and so far

she did not blame him; but he had also made use of means to press his suit which a man of generous feeling would have disdained to use. Now that he had obtained a greater power over her, was it likely that he would hesitate to use *that*? This, however, was taking the best view of his character—namely, that though resolved to have no scruples in attaining his object, he had really a fondness for her. On the other hand, he was poor, and perhaps some report of her being possessed of a fortune had been her attraction for him from the first. With that wretched letter of her late husband's in his mind, it was now impossible he could be ignorant of her position, and even if the idea of personal aggrandisement had not hitherto occurred to him, it would do so for the future. In any case, she would be the easier prize.

> Love from its eminence
> Torn by harsh evidence,

had assumed *this* shape to poor Sophy's mind

even thus early; nor can we say, alas! that imagination had played her false.

'As to Mr. Adair's writing that he hopes to have the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Sophy,' continued the waiting-maid, 'what crime is there in that? It is surely a natural thing enough for any young man to say.'

'I will not see him alone,' cried Sophy, excitedly. 'Of course, if he comes as a guest I shall be civil to him, as to any one else. But I will give him no interview; I will not see him alone.'

'Certainly not; why should you? That would be indeed making too much of the matter—he will see that for himself; of course he will come if he has an invitation from your guardian, but, you may take my word for it, he will not attempt to call.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ABIGAIL.

It is so much the fashion nowadays to paint men piebald, each one with so much of vice and so much of virtue, and with about equal parts of each, that the simple old dividing lines of good and bad run some risk of being lost sight of altogether. Compared with this plan, I am inclined to think the ancient custom of separating the sheep from the goats to be truer to nature. When a brute occasionally shows himself human, we are too much inclined to talk about redeeming qualities, whereas the redemption is often only so much of personal insurance as his own prudence dictates to prevent his being hanged offhand

like a mad dog. It is my fixed conviction that society at large is quite ignorant of the utter villainy and heartlessness of some even of its own ornaments, and that there are a vast number of people outside Newgate quite as bad as those who are inside.

But Jeannette Perkins was really piebald; or rather, since she was smooth, oleaginous, and fit for domestic use—let us say streaky, like bacon. She had a kind heart, and even an honest one, but she had no disinclination to underhand proceedings; if she had been the mother of a grown-up family of daughters she would have been a managing woman, a match-maker; as it was, she was an intriguer. She was loyal, yet not impervious to a bribe. The news of her ill-success with her young mistress as regards recommending Adair to her favourable consideration had been conveyed to him from time to time, though not without difficulty. She was much too prudent to commit herself on paper, and it was

by no means easy to get speech with the young scholar unobserved. The authorities in a University town, notwithstanding the influence doubtless exercised by the teaching of Plato, think it advisable to discourage personal communication between those *In statu pupillari* and domestic servants of the feminine gender. But Adair and Jeannette, from whose minds nothing was further than any idea of flirtation, did, nevertheless, have an occasional meeting-place in a retired thoroughfare—in the long vacation almost utterly deserted—leading to the river. When she had anything to communicate to him, she repaired thither at a certain appointed hour, at which he was always there in waiting for her. They met there on the evening of Adair's return from Haredale College.

'You have news,' he said, directly he caught sight of her face. Jeannette's countenance, always expressive, was now full of significance; but to a close observer there was

anxiety behind it. A physiognomist, who was not also a sanguine lover, might have had doubts as to her news being good news. 'You have persuaded Miss Sophy to come out of her shell?' he added, eagerly.

'Something has persuaded her,' she answered, gravely. Then he knew that Sophy had confided in her (about which he had been by no means certain), and felt himself at liberty to speak plainly. For the moment, however, he thought it judicious to ignore this. 'What a good girl you are!' he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. The word 'good' is an elastic one; it is even used in the City to express solvency: and it was certainly not the moral qualities of the young woman that Adair had in his mind when he pronounced this eulogium.

'I have done my best,' she returned, demurely. 'When you have got your foot inside "The Laurels" your success must depend upon yourself, remember.'

'I shall achieve it,' returned the young man, confidently; 'it is always the first step that is the most difficult, though for some time, perhaps, I shall be in need of your helping hand.'

His tone was not only one of reflection but one of calculation, or so it seemed to the girl's suspicious ear.

'That is as much as to say,' she replied, drily, 'that as soon as you have reached the top of the tree, you will kick down the ladder by which you climbed to it.'

'You are very much mistaken, Jeannette,' he put in, hastily. 'You will not have seen the last of my sovereigns, if you mean that; it is always well to have a friend at court beside the queen herself: her Majesty may perhaps, require a little management,' and he smiled in a manner that to Jeannette's mind was more significant than assuring.

'Now Heaven forgive me,' ran her thoughts, 'if I am helping my dear mistress

out of the frying-pan into the fire. I confess I don't like that look of his. If he turns out as bad a bargain as the other it will be the worse for her, for he has more brains to work mischief with. However, beggars can't be choosers. It is not a question of more fish in the sea; one must be content with *this* fish, whether it's a skate or a salmon.'

'As to success being easy even now, Mr. Adair,' she returned aloud, 'if I were in your place I should not be so certain. You know better than me which way you have hitherto gone to work; but I would recommend you to be careful.'

'I really don't understand you, my good girl.'

'And perhaps you don't quite understand my mistress. She is one to be led, and not drove.'

'Drove? How could I drive her? One would think I had the whip-hand of her, as you have.'

Jeannette shrank back from him with a frown. His tone was almost menacing. She did not like that expression of her being 'whip-hand;' it once more suggested to her that this man might turn out a tyrant like the other. Adair imagined that she was annoyed upon her own account.

'I don't mean that you abuse your influence over your young mistress, Jeannette, but only that you *have* great influence.'

'It was not gained by bullying her, Mr. Adair, and by getting at her secrets (though I know them), and holding them over her like a whip over a dog.'

'I hope not, indeed,' answered the other, but with a flush on his pale face; 'that could scarcely be the way for a maid to secure the affections of her mistress.'

'And it is still less the way, let me tell you, Mr. Adair, for a lover to secure the affections of a young lady. Sooner than put up with that, if she took my advice, she will

make any sacrifice. I should like to see the man, lover or husband, who would bully me? I'd throw the teapot over him when the water was on the bile.'

Adair dropped his eyelids and stroked his budding moustache. 'You are altogether on the wrong tack, Jeannette,' he answered, quietly. 'I never attempted to coerce your young mistress in any way; you yourself must acknowledge how studiously I have forborne to inflict my presence on her since—ahem!—since her recent bereavement.'

'Yes, yes, you know all about that, of course, sir; you've great cards to play; but for all that you may lose the game; and if you do you'll deserve to lose it. Moreover, let me say this, while there's yet time. Even if you *do* win, you will know what an advantage you had to start with. You can never say that you sat down to play on equal terms. I think she likes you a little, quite as much as, under the circumstances, you ought to

expect, or, for all I know, deserve. Improve your position with her, if you can. She's a dear, sweet girl; and, no matter what has come and gone, worth any man's love. But, even if you win her, don't look for too much; whatever steps you take will now be taken with your eyes open—very wide. You will have no right at any future time to turn round on her and say, "You never loved me; you married me out of necessity!"'

'I hope I shall never think that,' said Adair, gently; 'or, if I did think so, that I should be too much of a gentleman to say so. I shall always remember, even if I am so fortunate as to recommend myself to Miss Sophy, that I have had a predecessor in her affections—for before she found out what a dull clown he was, I can easily imagine that she may have liked him; so that there will be as little chance of illusion on my part as of pretence of affection on hers.'

'I am glad to hear you say so,' was the

girl's quiet reply; 'and I hope, for both your sakes, you will keep your word.'

Then there was silence for awhile. Jeannette, whose passion—raised as much by her misgivings respecting the part she herself was taking in the matter as by her distrust of Adair—had by no means subsided, was wondering whether it might be judicious or not to give him a bit more of her mind. Adair, upon whom her warnings had had no more effect (except that they angered him) than a lesson upon economy read to a spendthrift, was considering his next step—a visit to 'The Laurels.' He had hitherto studiously avoided calling there, for a Machiavellian reason of his own; he had thought that his abstinence in that respect would impress Sophy with the idea that he wished to spare her feelings, and at the same time remind her that he was cognisant of her intimate relations with Perry. By this means, he flattered himself he had at once exhibited his sagacity and generosity.

One drawback to this ingenious behaviour, however, was that he had suffered so long a time to elapse that it was difficult to reopen communications. He had a vague notion that it was usual to call at a house where one has been entertained, but that it ought to be done the next day, and not, as would now be the case, a fortnight afterwards. Such was his embarrassment, and also his high opinion of Jeannette's intelligence, that he resolved to lay his difficulties before her.

'And what reason would you suggest, my good girl, for my calling at "The Laurels"?'

'I should have thought you were the last young gentleman in the world to be in want of a reason for anything,' returned Jeannette, naïvely; 'but, as it happens, you must not call at all. My mistress won't see you and that's flat.'

'Not see me? Why you told me yourself that she had resolved to come out of her shell.'

'Yes: but you are to remain in yours. Come when you're asked, but don't force yourself upon her; and she will have *no* private interview; on that she's fixed. So you are not to call.'

'But if I'm not to call, and not to be invited——'

'But you will be invited. Master has some friends to dinner to-morrow, and you will be one of them.'

Adair's eyes grew bright at once.

'But will it not be very awkward to meet Mrs.—I mean Miss Sophy—for the first time, after what has happened between us—that is the letter I sent to her—in company?'

'It may be very awkward for some, but not for her; or, at least, the other way would be a deal awkwarder. No, that's how it's to be; it's the best I can do for you, Mr. Adair.'

'And very well you have done it, Jeannette.' Here he pressed a couple of coins

into her hand, which chinked very pleasantly. It was the first time she had heard it; for, like the cymbals, it takes two of them to make music. 'I am a poor man now, but on the day I marry your mistress I will give you fifty pounds.'

'You are very kind, sir,' said Jeannette, demurely, as she dropped a curtsey and took her leave.

As she did so, she wiped her mouth, mechanically, with the back of her hand.

'Lawks! what a thing habit is,' was her mental reflection. 'Now, I suppose nineteen young gentlemen out of twenty in his position would have done it, and yet it never so much as crossed his mind a moment. Not that I want his kisses—bah! but it's not to his credit. He's a cold-blooded one, he is, that's certain. He "parts" freely—that I will say—which the other one, though he was ready enough to kiss, only I wouldn't let him —no, not for nothing, young gentleman—

would never part. Kissing and parting should always go together. If I could only think better of the man I should be happier in my mind. Fifty pounds is a big lump for a poor girl like me; but not for five hundred pounds would I do Miss Sophy so ill a turn as to help her to a scoundrelly husband. Mr. Adair would win her, no doubt, without my help; for he's masterful enough for anything, and, moreover, there's no other way out of it for her. She knows that well enough, though she pretends not to know it; but, still, I could stop it, and if I felt sure he was a bad lot I *would* stop it. I'd go straight to the Canon. But I'm not sure about him, I have only my doubts.' Here she took out her purse and dropped the two sovereigns which she had slipped in her glove into it. Again the golden music caught her ear. 'After all,' she mused, 'there's nothing actually against Mr. Adair; and if they ain't downright bad ones, I expect one husband is about the same

as another. If he does turn out a bad one and illuses Miss Sophy, then—as I had half a mind to tell him just now—let him look out for squalls. I don't mean *her* squalls, poor dear—he'll have to settle with Jenny Perkins. I am glad I didn't utter that threat, because now, in case of the worst, he will think I'm on his side, and not on hers. He has a great belief in money, and thinks it will buy everybody, body and soul, but it will not buy Jenny Perkins—no not millions of it—to turn against her mistress. I say again, Mr. John Adair, if you mean mischief, you had need look out for squalls.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LITTLE DINNER PARTY.

THE guest of the evening at the Canon's promised little dinner party was, of course, Mr. Frederic Irton. He was a visitor—that is to say, though himself a Fellow of his college, he had left Cambridge for London, and he was the betrothed of Henny Helford. An engaged young man is always an object of interest to the other sex—even if they are themselves provided with a husband, or not in want of one; which latter case was, of course, Aunt Maria's. Though he has made his success with the object of his suit he is still on his trial with *them*, and they are all curious to see him, and especially to discover

what *she* sees in him. Mr. Irton, it is true, was well known to Aunt Maria, but not in the capacity of an engaged man. There were, therefore, many new points of interest about him. He was of medium height, and only moderately good-looking, if judged by any æsthetic standard; but he had a bright, pleasant face; he appeared even younger than he was, from the absence of whisker on his cheek, and from the profusion of short curly hair, without any parting, upon his head. He had a crisp, alert look, very becoming in a young solicitor, because suggestive of promptness as well as sagacity. He had been prompt enough in securing Henny, but had too much consideration for her filial feelings to insist on an immediate union, to which her mother was so strongly opposed; but there was something in his keen eye which forbad the idea that he was a man to be sacrificed to a mother-in-law beyond reasonable limits.

His tone to Mrs. Helford was studiously

gentle and respectful, but when she attempted to snub him, as she sometimes did, it became humorously incisive. To a stranger, such as Adair, his manner was cordial, yet not such as could be described as winning. There was a certain reticence about it commonly seen only in older men, which seemed to convey, 'I have no doubt you are an excellent fellow, but I have no guarantee of it; and, therefore, you must consider these friendly advances as being without prejudice. It may be my unpleasant duty some day to indict you for felony at the Old Bailey.'

With the Canon and Mr. Mavors (upon whose 'side' he had been) he was an old favourite; but he had on this occasion a certain novelty even for them. As for Henny, though he was no novelty for her, it was a pretty sight to see how he monopolised her attention. His words (which, indeed, were well chosen enough) could not have seemed of more importance to her if she had been

his client, and had had to pay for them. Sophy, too, like the rest, gave her outward regards to the young solicitor, as was naturally expected of her; but her whole soul was, in fact, given up, though far from voluntarily, to the retiring young scholar whom she met now for the second time only, under her guardian's roof, with the conventional smile of welcome. It has been said that young women regard all marriageable men as possible husbands, but certainly few ever looked upon a comparative stranger with that contingency so plainly before her (though she did her best to shut her eyes to it) as poor Sophy. She rarely looked towards him, yet he was always present to her mental vision; if she did look, it seemed, if his face was averted, that it had but just been turned elsewhere; that when she was not looking he kept his gaze fixed on her, and her alone; and if their eyes met, it was to flash asunder with a laboured and fruitless pretence at in-

difference to one another. It fell, of necessity, to Adair's lot to take her into dinner, since their elders paired together, and to have separated the affianced lovers would have been an outrage. She sat between him and Mr. Mavors, just as she had done at the Canon's rooms on the procession night; but with what different feelings! In one short month how all had altered with her, and how amazing was the change in her relations with him! A reflection which she was well aware must be present to his mind also.

She found it almost impossible to converse with him in her usual tone; and he was careful not to force his talk upon her. To the rest it seemed that these young people were 'not getting on' with one another very well; but in every word of Adair's, and in his manner—even in the way in which he passed the salt to her—she saw, or thought she saw, a studious demonstration of forbearance which certainly pleased her. In his whole behaviour,

so far from conveying a hint of his possessing any advantage over her, there was a respectful gentleness, which, to say truth, had been wanting on the previous occasion. He had then been somewhat solicitous to assert his personal independence as well as unwilling to let her forget what he knew about her; but now he was so modestly silent, that the kind-hearted Canon felt quite distressed for his *protégé*, and drew him into prominence in spite of himself.

'I do hope, Adair,' said he, in a pause in the conversation, 'that you are quite at liberty to throw these Haredale people over, if it suits you to do so.—Don't you think, Mavors, that it would be very foolish in a young man of Adair's expectations to commit himself to a scholastic calling so early?'

'Most people are the best judges of what they themselves are fit for,' said the Tutor, indifferently. 'Besides, it depends upon what aims a man has in life.'

'Well, naturally, Adair's aim is to put money in his pocket; and also (which, of course, is the attraction in this case) to do it as soon as possible.'

'Then my advice to Adair,' observed Mr. Mavors, 'is to marry a rich widow.'

Every one laughed except Henny, who very properly exclaimed, 'For shame, Mr. Mavors!' But two of the faces round the table reddened with anything but mirth. One has heard in a lifetime of dinners a good many things lightly said—truths spoken in jest—over the social board, the memory of some of which puts one in a cold perspiration whenever we recall them; but for two of his audience Mr. Mavor's dry cynical remark (though he did not know it) capped them all. Finding it well received, he went on (as a sleep-walker among precipices wanders on from steep to steeper) to improve upon it.

'But why reprove me, Miss Helford? I

did not say an old widow. Why shouldn't she be well jointured, and yet be young?'

As the young scholar only answered these sallies by an embarrassed smile, the Canon good-naturedly came to his rescue. 'There are no widows in Cambridge, however, answering to that description, eh, my lad?'

In his passionate annoyance Adair flung out his hand mechanically under the table, and, as ill-luck would have it, it met Sophy's hand. She knew, of course, that the movement was unintentional; but if it had been taken for a mutual confidence, that contact could hardly have been more significant. It seemed to establish an understanding with him, beyond the power of mere words to effect.

'I have always heard,' observed Miss Aldred, following on the same side as her brother, 'that it is always dangerous to marry a widow because of the unpleasant comparisons which she may make.'

'For my part,' sighed Mrs. Helford, with her most lachrymose air, 'I cannot imagine how any woman can marry twice.'

'That's a pretty compliment to the male sex, upon my word,' laughed the Canon. 'What do you say, Henny? Dip "far into the future, far as human eye can reach," and give us your opinion.'

'I object to that,' said Irton; 'first on principle, because no opinion ought to be given for nothing; and, secondly, on personal grounds. These post-nuptial, not to say post-mortem arrangements——'

'Now, Frederic, don't be horrid,' interrupted Henny. 'Really, Canon, I am quite astonished at your permitting such a shocking conversation.'

'It was all Mr. Mavors, my dear Henny; he's a tutor of his College, and now you know what sort of advice he gives to the young men who are placed under his sway. I dare say he gave it to Irton,

only he disregarded it, as young men generally do.'

'I am quite in the hands of the company,' observed Adair, speaking for the first time. 'If any one has a widow to recommend, and will recommend *me*, I am sure I should be very grateful. There's a house at Haredale College, sir, at my disposal' (here he turned to the Canon), 'which is certainly not intended for a bachelor.'

'Don't you take that place if there are ten houses—a whole terrace,' exclaimed the Canon, emphatically. 'You will be throwing yourself away there, Adair. You ought to embrace the law, or, still better, commerce.'

'The widow may still be combined,' murmured the incorrigible Frederic.

Miss Aldred drew herself up a little stiffly.

'What sort of a place is Haredale College, Mr. Adair?' she inquired.

'A huge and not very picturesque esta-

lishment on the north-west coast, Madam. If you took Addenbrook Hospital and set it down by the sea without a tree or a shop within a mile of it, it would look very like the place. The patients, however—I mean the pupils—are very numerous.'

'A society confined to schoolmasters and boys must be awful,' observed Mr. Mavors.

'Yes; much worse than one comprised of tutors and young men, I should imagine,' said the Canon, drily.

'That's very hard upon me, Miss Gilbert, don't you think?' said Mr. Mavors, dropping his voice as he addressed his fair neighbour.

'I don't think my guardian could be hard on anybody, much less on you,' returned Sophy, in the same low tone. 'You must be well aware what a great favourite you are with him.'

'I did not know I was a favourite with anybody.'

'That must be your humility, Mr. Mavors,' was the gracious reply. She didn't mean anything by it, but her voice was so gentle—it was poor Sophy's way; just as it is some women's way to be curt and pert—that her companion might well have taken it for tenderness.

'It is a virtue with which few people credit me,' replied the Tutor (and he never spoke truer words in his life); 'yet there are occasions like the present'—here he heaved a little sigh—'when I have felt humble enough.'

'This college of yours must be in a very out-of-the-way part of the world, Adair,' observed the host. 'How long does it take you to get there?'

'I went down on Tuesday morning, sir, and arrived the same day.'

'But you didn't go by a very early train, I think?' observed Mr. Irton.

It was one of those unexpected observa-

tions which, without having anything of importance in them, arouse attention. The conversation, which had become general, suddenly ceased.

'Not very early. I went by the ten o'clock express.'

'That's very curious,' returned Irton. 'I could have made affidavit that I saw you having lunch in the City at one o'clock last Tuesday. I have been trying to remember, ever since I had the pleasure of being introduced to you this evening, where it was I had met you before; and I was convinced, at last, it was at the Cornish Coffee-House.'

'I know no more of the coffee-house you speak of than of Cornwall,' returned Adair, smiling.

'Dear me, how strange! Then it must have been your double. He was taking an American drink. I can see it now, thrown from glass to glass in the deftest way, mint julep—at the bar.'

'I know it,' exclaimed the Canon. 'It is alluded to in "Comus"':—

> This cordial julep here
> That flames and dances in its crystal bounds
> With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed.

Amid the mirth produced by this classical quotation, the ladies withdrew, and the grief for their loss was immediately mitigated by tobacco.

Under the influence of that enchanting weed, and the sense of freedom (for though a most gallant gentleman, female society always embarrassed him), Mr. Mavors was wont to exhibit considerable eloquence, not wholly disconnected, if he was opposed, with combativeness; but on this occasion he kept silence. He had something to think about, of which he had never thought seriously before. Notwithstanding the disadvantage of his years, he had come to the conclusion that Miss Sophy was not entirely indifferent

to him. Without being a wealthy man, he had a competence sufficient to marry upon, without waiting for a college living; and never had he seen a young lady so attractive to him as the Canon's ward.

Mr. Irton, on the contrary, was full of talk; and, without reverting to his impression of having met Adair elsewhere, the association of ideas suggested to him as a topic, *alibis*. The subject when well treated possesses considerable interest; and he had not been so long at his new trade as to lose sight of those salient points which make legal matters interesting to the outsider. His host, at all events, was vastly amused; which is a great point gained for any guest. It is better to please the King than all the Royal family. Adair, too, seemed interested, and threw in a question or two; but, in truth, both the teller and the topic were distasteful to him. His lips moved, for the most part, without

utterance, and what they privately remarked was, 'I wish this meddling fellow had been drowned, like the other one.'

In the drawing-room Mr. Irton devoted himself to his *fiancée*. *Alibis* became the very last thing likely to enter into his mind. Mr. Mavors, missing by half a second the opportunity of turning Sophy's music for her at the piano, resigned himself to the society of his hostess, who, so far from being piqued at his inattention to her remarks, pitied him from the bottom of her heart. Mrs. Helford button-holed the Canon, and, to his great disgust, began to compare the disreputable 'darling' who had spent her money and half broken her heart to his own Robert.

'We two, Canon, have each lost the prop of our lives—you by absence, I by death. That should always be a bond of sympathy between us.'

The Canon was not so well acquainted with the mother's peculiarities as with the history of her prodigal son; and the only excuse he found it possible to make for her was that she must have exceeded her usual allowance of wine at dinner. Adair, standing beside Sophy at the piano, and occasionally leaning over her when she came to the end of a page, had no cause to find fault with Fortune. There is something in music, as even the most unmusical must allow, that fosters the gentler emotions; and there are very few songs that have not some touch of tenderness in them—a hint of secret sorrow, or the veiled expression of a hope. Everything Sophy sang had a meaning in it for both of them, beyond what the tune conveyed, or the intention of the singer; and once or twice he ventured to throw in a whispered word or two of his own, which made still more clear what needed no interpreter. The perform-

ance concluded with a favourite song of the Canon's :—

> Forget thee! if to dream by night, and think on thee by day,
> If all the worship deep and wild a lover's heart can pay,
> If that is to forget thee, then indeed art thou forgot.

And when every one else exclaimed, 'How charming!' or 'How sweet!' Adair murmured in her burning ears, 'How true!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DIFFERENT OPINIONS.

FROM the moment on which Sophy received the young scholar's letter, with its all-important enclosure, or, at all events, from that in which the interview with her guardian had been concluded, without her having had the courage to confess her secret to him, I think she had a pretty certain conviction that Adair would become her husband. It was evidently his intention to win her, and his force of will, she was well aware, was infinitely stronger than her own. She had refused to acknowledge his victory even to herself, and had fought against her own apprehensions, but with the consciousness that she was fighting against

fate. Jeannette, very wisely for the object she had in view, had not laid so much stress upon the necessity of the union as upon its convenience and advantages. Mr. Adair might not be, perhaps, so passionately in love with her mistress as another young gentleman had once been ; but from what had happened in that case, passion, it would seem, went a very little way towards ensuring happiness in married life. A resolute affection fixed upon its object, but never giving way to vehemence and impetuosity, might be better calculated to last. Her money might be some attraction to him ; but he had certainly shown a fondness for her before he came to learn that she had money, or, at all events, had any certain knowledge of the amount of it. And was it not better to trust one's money to a young fellow (even if he has none of his own) with a turn for figures, and therefore presumably for getting it and keeping it, than to some one perhaps a little better provided with this

world's goods, but also (as was likely to be the case) with a more decided turn for spending it? In a word, though Mr. John Adair might not be an eligible husband, he could in no sense, with his habits of diligence and talents, be termed a 'detrimental.' And in her heart Sophy had accepted him—or, rather, accepted her own position—before the date of the Canon's dinner party.

It was some time afterwards before she allowed Adair to conclude as much, but her silence on that occasion (though indeed it would have been difficult for her to speak even if she had wished—nay, she did *wish*, if she had ventured—to defy him) he had rightly enough taken for something very like consent. So far as Sophy was concerned, he had, in fact, very good reason to congratulate himself on the result of the evening's entertainment. His behaviour, he felt sure, had also recommended him to the Canon and Miss Aldred; but he was equally sure that he had

failed in making a good impression upon Mr. Frederic Irton, and, as a consequence, upon Miss Henny Helford. This last was a serious misfortune; he knew that Henny was Sophy's bosom friend, and though he had little knowledge of social life, his natural intelligence informed him that it was most important to win her over to his cause. As it happened, things had gone so well that he flattered himself he should have no need of her good offices; but he would have liked to have been able to count on them, and as soon as this detestable young solicitor had betaken himself off to his legal web he resolved to do his best to undo whatever harm he might have done him, and to make himself as agreeable to Henny as possible.

Whether Mr. Adair was correct in his judgment may be gathered from the various opinions expressed about him when the little dinner party had broken up. In spite of Burns's dictum the gift of seeing ourselves

as others see us is not so very rare; it is not common, I admit; perhaps least common among the class whom we call self-conscious. Their egotism causes them to give too great weight to their actions, and therefore to the impression produced by them. But your social reprobate, who is anxious not to be taken for what he is, is very keen to perceive what sort of reflection he makes in the minds of others; which is the true reason why good men are disliked by bad men.

'The more I see of that young fellow Adair the more I like him, Maria,' observed the Canon to his sister, when Sophy had wished them good-night and they were left alone in the drawing-room.

'It is quite unnecessary to tell me that, my dear William,' was that lady's quiet reply. 'Every one can see that he is a great favourite of yours; and if he didn't highly estimate your good-will, and reciprocate it, he would be a very ungrateful young man.'

'I don't know that he owes anything very particular to me, my dear. I've asked him to dinner twice—which, considering how very temperate he is in his drinking, cannot have placed upon his shoulders any great weight of obligation, say a pound sterling.'

'What nonsense you talk, brother! Think of your position—a man of European reputation, and a Canon of your cathedral!'

'It isn't *my* cathedral, Maria,' he answered, quietly; 'and I hope you are not going to do such an injustice to your intelligence as to take a Canon for a very important personage. It is only a question of time; in twenty years, if I am not much mistaken, that young fellow will make a better position for himself—at all events, as far as money goes—than mine. Let him once get his foot on the commercial ladder, and he is bound to climb to the top of it. I never knew so young a man with so clear a head, and with such a talent at once for calculation and for business; and then his

habits are so regular; his tutor speaks of him in the highest terms.'

'I don't think Mr. Mavors likes him.'

'Mavors is not his tutor, and knows nothing about him. Moreover, though a most excellent fellow, Mavors has made a groove for himself, just as a hare squats in her form, and nothing ever startles him out of it. He has an absolute antipathy to young people.'

Aunt Maria smiled in such a very superior way that the Canon could hardly ignore it.

'What, you think it is only young *men* that he despises, and not young women? You still think he is pining for Sophy?'

'I am quite sure he has fallen in love with her. I had very little doubt of it, as I told you; but his behaviour last night convinced me.'

'Well, it struck me that after dinner he devoted himself rather conspicuously to *you*, my dear.'

'The unfortunate man couldn't help it. Mr. Adair was too quick for him in offering his services to Sophy at the piano. But his ears and eyes were given to her, not me.'

'What on earth could she do with them?' exclaimed the Canon, comically; 'or even his hand, if he was to offer her that?'

'You will soon have an opportunity for judging; mark my words, he'll propose for her within the month.'

'If he does it at all, I think he is right to be prompt,' observed the Canon, drily. 'As a bridegroom, Mavors has no time to lose.'

'In my opinion Sophy might do worse,' observed Aunt Maria, gravely.

'Doubtless; but, unlike Mavors, she has plenty of time before her; and she may do better. Of course there may be cases to the contrary; but, on the whole, I am against much disparity of age in marriage, even where the disadvantage is with the man. Why, in ten years' time, Mavors, for example,

will be an old man and Sophy a young woman.'

'I disagree with you there; a woman ages with so much greater rapidity than a man. When two young people marry, in ten years the husband is still, as it were, seaworthy, while the wife is a wreck.'

'Still if there is anything good in him he does not desert her; he stands by the wreck. The memory of the years they have lived together, of their mutual joys and sorrows, hallows her for him.'

'She sometimes becomes so sacred that he never goes near her,' returned Aunt Maria, grimly. 'She is a shrine resorted to on special occasions—birthdays and the like—but he seeks his everyday society elsewhere.'

'You are painting a very selfish, ungrateful man, Maria,' said the Canon, gravely.

'Most men are selfish, William; many are ungrateful. I know very well of whom you are thinking; one, to do you justice, of

whom you seldom think ; you are thinking of yourself. It is true you have nothing to reproach yourself with as regards your married life. The best of husbands.'

'No, no, no,' said the Canon, vehemently. 'It was not so. Don't speak of it.' He moved to the other side of the room to conceal his agitation ; she had never before seen him so moved.

'One must judge from one's own experience, Maria,' he said, presently.

> Old age and youth cannot live together;
> One is full of pleasure, one is full of pain.

'There was really only a few hours, as one gathers from Milton, between Adam's age and Eve's.'

'What did Milton know about it?' said Aunt Maria, scornfully.

'Good heavens ! Who else should know?'

'A man who had three wives !' ejaculated the lady.

'That only makes his knowledge about matrimony more to be relied upon,' urged the Canon. 'He wrote in the highest terms of your sex, my dear. "My late espoused saint," he calls one of his wives. What charms he must have seen in her!'

'The gentleman was blind and the lady was dead,' observed Aunt Maria, cynically. 'You are too good for this world, my dear William, too trustful, and, for all your wisdom, as simple as a child. If you are really thinking of Mr. Adair as a husband for Sophy, I confess I don't approve your choice.'

'Such a thing never entered into my head,' exclaimed the Canon, stoutly; 'that is —ahem—except as a mere remote contingency.'

'Then I saw it through a telescope, William, for there it is.' There was silence between them for a moment or two. 'The women are witches,' was the thought that

flashed through the Canon's brain and coloured his cheeks.

'And why don't you like Mr. John Adair?' he inquired presently with hesitation. 'Is it because he is poor, or that he is not an Adonis?'

'I didn't say I didn't like him, William; I only observed that I didn't approve of your choice of him as Sophy's husband. If Sophy chooses him for herself I shall have nothing to say against him, except that she might have done better. But don't throw him at her head.'

'Throw him at her head!' ejaculated the Canon.

'I mean, don't let her see (as *I* have seen) that it is your wish she should take him. She will marry early, no doubt; and, as we have been told on good authority, so much the better. But give others a fair chance.'

'Others! I can see without a telescope

whom you have got in *your* head, my dear Maria. "Mavors on the Brain" is a capital name for a scientific treatise, but, as regards the patient, it is, in my opinion, a sign of monomania.'

To which Aunt Maria deigned no other reply than that female shibboleth, 'We shall see.'

The three guests from next door had also their opinion to offer as regarded Mr. John Adair. Mrs. Helford described him as a very well-behaved young man, 'a young man who could never say anything which could bring a blush to a lady's cheek' (a palpable hit at Henny's Frederic, and his allusions to the possible combinations of a widow with other callings); 'a young man who did not monopolise conversation, modest but evidently very sensible.' She even hinted, not obscurely, to Henny in private, that he was the sort of young man who, had she been in *her* position, she would have been very willing to

see become her suitor, as not being of so masterful a disposition as some young men she could have mentioned (had not delicacy of feeling forbidden it), and as more likely to make home happy. She concluded by stating that she thought Mr. Adair 'a decided acquisition,' and had asked him to call at 'The Laburnums.'

'I tell you what will happen,' said Frederic, when he found himself alone with his intended, after judgment upon the young scholar had been thus pronounced by her mother, 'you will have a step-father before you get a husband.'

'Oh, Frederic, how can you be so silly?'

'It is not *I* who am so silly, my darling; in my opinion such a contingency is quite on the cards. He has been recommended to look out for a widow, and has evidently recommended himself to one. That young man will be my papa.'

In spite of the consciousness that such remarks were highly disrespectful, Henny could not help laughing outright at them. It was the one thing to be deplored in her dear Frederic that he was just a little wanting in reverence sometimes, and so exceedingly amusing that he caused others to share his crime.

'Thank Heaven, she has only a limited income,' continued the joker, gravely, 'and will therefore afford less temptation.'

'But, seriously, my dear Fred,' and Henny looked serious enough as she put the question, 'do you think Mr. Adair is a designing person?'

'I don't say designing, because that may be actionable, my love; but I will confine myself to agreeing with the Canon, that he has marvellous powers of calculation. He "doesn't know much," that excellent gentleman also informed me, "but what he does know he knows thoroughly;" and here is one

thing of which I am sure he has a most keen perception—namely, on which side his bread is buttered.'

'You must not be hard upon him, Fred,' pleaded the girl; 'remember, he has no means, and is without social position.'

'Born of poor but dishonest parents,' quoted Fred, cynically.

'Nobody says that,' she answered, gravely; 'and even if it were true it would not be his fault. I believe you are prejudiced against him just because mamma has such a strong feeling in his favour.'

'That didn't prejudice me against *you*, my darling,' he answered, tenderly. 'However, I confess I don't like the man. I don't want to be uncharitable. There are some cases where the temptation to tell a lie is very great, and I don't know how strong it may have been in this case; but, as a general rule, I don't like liars, and this man told me a deliberate falsehood.'

'A falsehood, Frederic? What about?'

'He said he did not lunch at the Cornish Coffee-House last Tuesday. Now, I saw him there with my own eyes as distinctly as I see you now.'

'But, surely, it might have been a case of mistaken identity.'

'No, Henny, no; there is not another man like Mr. Adair—so keen-eyed, and hatchet-faced, and dark. Cruikshank's picture of Simon Renard resembled him. But still I should know him from Simon Renard. No; he had some reason for concealing the fact that he was in the City last Tuesday. Let us hope it was a good one; but there he was.'

'I heard all that passed,' said Henny, earnestly; 'though, it is true, I paid no particular attention to the matter; and the impression on my mind was that Mr. Adair was telling the simple truth. When you remarked that he could not have started early

for the North, he answered, "No, not very early; I went by the ten o'clock express." That struck me, considering that it was obvious that you were disproving his statement, as a most temperate and convincing reply.'

'Quite true, my darling; the remark does great credit to your intelligence. But the better the reply, supposing it was untrue, the worse for the young man's character, since it shows he is a cool hand—used to deception.'

'But what possible reason could he have for deceit? What objection could any one at the table have to his being in the City, even if he was there, instead of in the train, on Tuesday morning?'

'Ah! that is beyond me; but if I had him in the witness-box, and had retained Badger against him, with instructions to cross-examine, it would not be beyond Badger.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TUTOR'S PROPOSAL.

THE little dinner party at the Canon's had all the effect that he had intended it to produce, and more. It not only brought Sophy 'out of her shell,' but Mr. Mavors out of his. He called at 'The Laurels' no less than three times within the next fortnight, on the transparent pretext of wishing to see the Canon (known to be glued to the Concordance in his college rooms), and though he didn't say anything particular to Sophy or anybody else, looked (as Miss Aldred privately assured her brother) 'volumes.' Nor, although he showed no unseemly haste to make sure of the victory he had gained, did Mr. John Adair let the

grass grow under his feet. He left his card the day after the entertainment (which a book on etiquette had informed him was the proper course to pursue), and did not come in. It seemed sufficient for him to have satisfied himself that the two ladies were in good health. But on the following Monday, when Mr. Frederic Irton had left for London, he dropped in after luncheon time. He found both Aunt Maria and Sophy rather melancholy about little Stevie, who was very delicate, and had again succumbed to some malady; the circumstance rather gratified him than otherwise, since he was able to adopt a graver tone than he could otherwise have well put on, while it afforded a topic for the younger lady to converse with him upon without embarrassment. He felt that this was an important point gained, and was not at all disappointed that for the present he was not given an opportunity of seeing her alone. Without ever having read the story of 'Beauty and the

Beast,' he recognised the advantage of gradual familiarity with an object of apprehension. He did not conceal from himself for a moment that Sophy was secretly afraid of him. Even with the power that his knowledge of her secret gave him, he understood his task was to be no easy one; that he had to raise not only a dead weight of indifference, but to remove a certain sense of oppression which his previous conduct had produced. Jeannette's warning words had in this matter been very seasonable, and he had laid them to heart. From henceforth he dropped no syllable to Sophy that could have suggested mastery, or that she was in any way under his thumb. By this judicious course of treatment, joined to a manner of great but respectful tenderness, Adair succeeded in inducing in her a feeling of acquiescence; she began to contemplate the prospect of becoming his wife without a shudder, and even flattered herself that it was not a case of compulsion.

A circumstance took place in a few weeks which shook 'the low beginnings' of this pleasant faith to its foundations.

By this time Adair was a constant, nay, almost a daily, visitor at 'The Laurels;' he had become so much at home there that Miss Aldred, whom he treated with studied deference, began to look upon him less as her brother's *protégé* than as a friend of the family.

The continued illness of their little neighbour had been a source of great anxiety to the kind old lady, and put marriage and giving in marriage so out of her mind that she had almost forgotten to think of the young man as a possible suitor for Sophy's hand.

On a certain afternoon that young lady had seen from her window Adair coming towards the house as usual, and when the door-bell rang, had gone down to receive him in the drawing-room. It had become a thing of course for her to do so, when, as was

generally the case at that hour, Aunt Maria was not at home. She was exceedingly surprised therefore, when, instead of Mr. Adair, the butler announced Mr. Mavors. He wore a graver look than usual, and for the moment it struck her that something was amiss with the Canon, which the Tutor had come to tell her.

'You have no bad news, I hope, Mr. Mavors,' she said, with a little flutter at her heart.

'I hope not,' he answered, smiling. 'Is it so very strange, Miss Sophy, that I should pay you a visit?'

'It is not a favour we are accustomed to very frequently,' she answered, smiling. 'You are like an order of merit, Mr. Mavors, of which we are very proud, but which is not put on save upon high days and holidays.'

'And then only worn on the outside,' observed the Tutor, significantly.

'Nay, next the heart,' said Sophy, laugh-

ing; 'at least,' she added, quickly perceiving by the other's face that her compliment had been taken *au sérieux*, and gone further than she had intended, 'I believe orders *are* worn on the left hand, are they not?'

Here the countenance of the Tutor, which had been lit up with evident pleasure, became grave again even to depression. As a man who knew everything except botany, he could doubtless have told her on which side medals were worn, but that point remained unsolved.

'I have ventured to come here, Miss Sophy,' he said, with some hesitation, and in a much lower tone than was his wont, 'at an hour when I had reason to believe you would be found alone, to say a few words upon my own account.'

She bowed, but remained silent; it would not have been easy for her to speak, even had she been so minded. It was not, as we know, the first time, nor, to say truth, the second, nor the third, that Miss

Sophy Gilbert had seen a man at her feet; but this man, her instinct told her, was of a very different kind from those she had been accustomed to see in that position. There was a difference in years, but to that, strange to say, she was for the moment oblivious; the distinction which she recognised was one of character.

'You have hitherto known me, Miss Sophy, only as your guardian's friend; it is quite possible that you have never thought of me as an independent entity at all, or if at all, as a mere fogey—a college don.'

'That is a subject,' said Sophy, quietly, but with a tremor in her tone that betrayed not a little emotion, for his unwonted modesty, or rather the feeling which she well knew dictated it, had touched her—'that is a subject upon which I am quite unqualified to speak. I am as ignorant as those who would, perhaps, apply to you the epithets you mention; but I am not so stupid as to think

with them. My guardian has, however, often told me that you are a very learned and distinguished gentleman, and I believe him.'

Mr. Mavors waved his hand as though he would have put that by as nothing.

'The knowledge which I may possess,' he said, contemptuously, but in a tone, nevertheless, which implied a consciousness of possessing it, 'avails me nothing on the errand on which I am come to-day. My reputation, such as it is, is, I feel, since it presupposes mature years, by no means a recommendation to me; and yet I am not so very old as the judgment of youth, like your own, may have decided. I don't look quite a patriarch, I hope, Miss Sophy?' he added, with a forced smile.

'Indeed, Mr. Mavors, you do not.'

Nor did he. It was not only that the grey beard and white head was wanting; but the look with which he regarded her, though benevolent enough, was by no means patri-

archal. If Aunt Maria had seen it, indeed, she would certainly have plumed herself upon her sagacity, and exclaimed, 'Now, didn't I say he was in love with her?' And Miss Sophy was at least as good a judge of the tender passion as the more mature lady. Perhaps she had corroborated his disclaimer with too much alacrity, for once more that look of pleasure and of hope came into his eyes; but she felt a sincere pity for this honest gentleman—a pity, too, that was akin to tenderness, if not to love. And it was not in her nature to conceal her feelings: except upon compulsion, she was always frank.

'My life hitherto,' he went on, 'has been passed in pursuits with which it is impossible that a young woman can sympathise; but, unlike most men similarly placed, I am not wedded to them. I could give them up without regret; and I think I am not too old to assimilate myself to new conditions. The

very way in which I express myself is, I am well aware, unsuitable to the subject on which I would speak. I throw myself upon your charity to excuse all that; to make allowance also for many other things. I am a very humble suitor, Miss Sophy, but a genuine one. My heart is sound but not hard, I hope; yet you are the first woman that has ever made an impression on it. For that reason, perhaps, your image has struck the deeper into it. I have hitherto lived for myself alone. When I am in your presence the very thought of self vanishes; it seems to me that the highest happiness would be to live with you.'

Though the Tutor's style was somewhat high-flown, and, as he himself had said, unsuitable to a declaration of love, it was not unsuitable to *him;* on the contrary, it became him, while his manner had the earnestness and simplicity of a child. It was plain he was deeply moved. Nor was Sophy's de-

meanour by any means stoical. She felt for him with all her heart—and she felt for herself too. Young as she was, she had learnt by bitter experience how short-lived is passion without esteem; and while conscious of her own unworthiness, she felt that this man esteemed her. The time of day-dreams and illusions had for her been prematurely cut short. She no longer yearned for love; she wanted affection, quiet, and safety. This man would, she felt, be kind and loyal to her at all times: a man of honour, and a true gentleman—not of the conventional kind. Such an alliance would, without doubt, have the approval of her guardian and Aunt Maria; it would bring her once more into the fold of their affection, from which she had only not been driven forth because she had deceived them. Such a prospect might not be dazzling, but it offered repose, comfort, and even happiness. Something in her eyes (it was a tear) betrayed her thoughts, and

filled her companion with high expectation.

'Is it possible, dear Sophy,' he exclaimed, with trembling joy, 'that, in spite of all that is to be said against me, you are not altogether indifferent to me?'

He had made a movement towards her, but she stretched out her hand, with the palm downwards, to prevent it.

'That I am not indifferent to you, Mr. Mavors, unless respect, esteem, and even affectionate regard be indifference, is quite true, but I can never marry you.'

'You think that now,' he pleaded. 'I have taken you too much by surprise; you are astonished at my presumption, no doubt; and no wonder.'

'No, no,' she answered, earnestly; 'there is no presumption. The unworthiness is on my side, not on yours. But—do not argue it—do not press it—(for she saw that he was about to speak). I am engaged to another.'

'Engaged! Engaged to be married?'

'Yes. It was not my intention to make it known—that is, yet awhile. But you have a right to know it. I have promised Mr. Adair to marry him.'

Mr. Mavors did not, I think, dislike young men so much as he pretended to do; if he did, he often took a strange way of showing it—by assisting them when it was necessary, not only by his advice and influence, but by his purse; but there was one young man whom at that moment he certainly did dislike with genuine vehemence. His instinct seemed to tell him that the young scholar could never be the man of this girl's choice: that Sophy should love him appeared an impossibility. He could as easily have imagined her becoming enamoured of the square root of minus one: it was incredible. But not only did he feel Adair to be unfit for her; he was also very unfavourably impressed with the young man's character. He suspected

he had learnt the length of the Canon's foot, and was taking advantage of that information. He thought him an adventurer, a schemer. And his own Sophy—or rather the Sophy he would have made his own if she would have permitted it—was going to marry this charlatan of the higher mathematics!

'Is this quite fixed, Miss Gilbert?' he asked, in low despondent tones. 'Can nothing alter it?'

'Nothing.' She sighed heavily, as though she would have added, 'I sincerely regret to say.' But when he looked up with quick inquiring gaze, as if to ask what that sigh meant, she repeated with decision, 'Nothing.'

'I am very, very sorry,' he murmured, softly.

'And so am I,' she answered; 'that is,' she put in quickly, 'sorry, if you feel it so much, for your disappointment. There is no woman in the world who might not be proud of an offer from such a one as you, Mr.

Mavors; and I am very proud, very sensible of the honour you would have conferred upon me. We shall always be friends, I know.'

'Friends! Oh, yes, it can never be otherwise,' he replied, pathetically. 'My heart will be in your keeping always, though you will not know it. Friends! Well, I hope you may never want a friend; but if you do—a friend in need—if I am alive you will know where to find one. Good-bye, Miss Sophy; pray, pray do not suffer yourself to be so moved upon my account'—for the girl was crying bitterly. 'If I had thought it would have distressed you so, I would never have spoken.'

'I believe it,' she murmured, and held out her little hand, which he raised reverently to his lips. Then without once looking back at her, he left the room and let himself out at the front door. Two Trinity men met him in Trumpington Street on his way home, and

raised their caps. For once in his life, he took no notice of their salutation.

'How old Mavors is getting to look!' said one of these young gentlemen.

In any case forty-five would have seemed an age to him; but his observation was correct enough. Mr. Mavors was getting to look old; but the change, as it sometimes does, had taken place very suddenly with him —within, indeed, the last twenty minutes. If he could have seen what was taking place at 'The Laurels' he would have looked older still.

Sophy, locked in her own room, had thrown herself upon her little bed in a paroxysm of tears. She did not, indeed, feel desolate and forlorn as he did. Her heart was not in his keeping, as he had described his own to be in hers; their respective feelings were in each case the reverse of what from their relative ages they might have been expected to be. Sophy felt that she had lost

a man who loved her, and would have made her happy—one whom she would have willingly, nay, thankfully, have married, had she dared. Her cruel fate had reserved her for another, in whom, alas! however she strove to persuade herself to the contrary, she had no such confidence. She was like one who walks with open eyes, but spellbound, into a pitfall.

CHAPTER XXX.

LITTLE PITCHERS HAVE LONG EARS.

When Sophy had seen Adair coming up towards the gate of 'The Laurels,' she naturally took it for granted that he was coming in; but the fact was he had caught sight of Mr. Mavors going up the gravel sweep to make his call, and though Adair little guessed his errand, he felt no inclination to follow in his wake. 'Two are company, three are none,' is a proverb pretty generally accepted; but when one of the party is a tutor of his college, and another a scholar of the same, the truth of the saying is borne in upon the scholar with particular significance. Adair, however, was always averse to lose any of

his valuable time; and, finding himself in the neighbourhood, he thought it a good opportunity to call at 'The Laburnums' to inquire after little Stevie. The visitation of the sick, juvenile or otherwise, was not much in his line, nor could he, by the utmost stretch of charity, be said to be fond of children; but he had no objection to a character for philanthropy if it was to be got cheap, while it was of especial importance to him to conciliate the Helfords. He knew he would have a prejudice to remove in the case of at least one of the inmates of 'The Laburnums,' and though he was not a man to shrink from anything unpleasant where to face it was essential to his interests, this knowledge had deterred him from making any advances hitherto; to-day, however, circumstances had put the thing in his way, Moreover, he had brought a bouquet, nominally for Miss Aldred, but in reality intended for Sophy, and a third destination for it now suggested itself to him; he would pretend that he had

brought it to adorn the sick room of the little invalid. Though, as we have said, by no means close-fisted when it was his interest to be otherwise, Mr. John Adair had a frugal mind, and made even a bouquet go as far as possible. Still the bouquet—very large—was a little embarrassing ; he didn't dare leave it in the hall, lest some officious hand should stick it in a glass vase and appropriate it for general ornamentation ; nor could he, when introduced into the drawing-room hold it in his hand like a floral emblem when paying his good mornings to the ladies ; he therefore kept it in his hat, from which it protruded as from a flower-pot, and gave the undesired impression that he was about to perform a conjuring trick for their amusement.

'The servant tells me, Mrs. Helford,' he observed with emotion, 'that your dear little grandson is better. I should hardly have ventured to intrude my presence on you if it were not for that assuring intelligence.'

'Yes, he is better, thank you,' returned the widow, graciously; 'my daughter was just telling me that he has sunk into a refreshing sleep.'

'I suppose,' said Adair, emboldened by this information (which seemed to secure him from all consequences of so rash a suggestion), 'that the dear little soul does not care to see strangers?'

'On the contrary, he likes new faces,' replied the widow. 'Now that he is getting better, nothing pleases him better than to hold receptions in his apartment. I am sure my daughter, who is mistress of the ceremonies, will be happy to introduce you.'

'Are you fond of children, Mr. Adair?' inquired Henny, naïvely.

'Indeed, I hope so. Lavater says, you know, "Avoid that man who dislikes the laugh of a child."'

'Our poor Stevie,' said Henny, 'has not

been laughing much, I am sorry to say, just lately.'

Adair felt that his little quotation had somehow missed fire. His chagrin, however, enabled him all the better to adopt a tone more befitting the seriousness of the occasion.

'True—too true,' he sighed. 'None but a mother, or at least a grandmother, or an aunt, can understand these matters—I mean what it is to miss the smile from a child's lips, and to see the print of pain there in its stead.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mrs. Helford, 'I am sure you feel for us. It was only because you thought you would be in the way during our trouble, as I was telling my daughter only yesterday, that you did not call.'

'They have been discussing me, then,' said Adair to himself, and, as it seemed, not altogether favourably, since he had needed a defender.

'That, indeed, was the sole reason, Mrs. Helford. I had not forgotten your kind invitation, you may be sure.' Then he turned to Henny.

'Mr. Irton has left Cambridge, I understand. I had hoped to have had the pleasure of seeing him before he left, but somehow we didn't meet.'

As Irton had arranged their visits to the Canon's rooms with the express intention of avoiding Adair, the truthful Henny could hardly say that her Frederic reciprocated this friendly feeling.

'His time was very short,' she answered.

Here, as conversation languished, the visitor thought it a good opportunity for producing his bouquet.

'What beautiful flowers,' exclaimed Henny; 'but you don't mean to say they are for us?'

'It is not every young man, I am sure,' cried the widow, parenthetically, 'who thinks of paying us such graceful attention,' and she

cast a side glance at her daughter, which seemed to say, 'I know a young solicitor in whose practice the matter of bouquets is altogether wanting.'

'Oh, it is nothing worth speaking of,' murmured Adair; 'but since there was illness in the house, I thought a few flowers——' here he stammered and hesitated; he felt that he had introduced the thing in terms that suggested a sanitary precaution, or an antidote.

'But it is the thought which is so charming,' said Mrs. Helford, who had already produced a vase, and was taking the flowers out of their fastening.

As she had thus appropriated them as an ornament for her drawing-room, Adair could hardly explain that they were meant for other purposes; while, at the same time, he felt the absurdity of bringing the widow such a present, and how it would be set down by his enemies as an attempt to secure her good graces.

As for Henny, she was half amused and half ashamed, having, probably, a prevision of the fun that Mr. Frederic Irton would make of it when he came to hear of what had happened.

It was clear to Adair that though he had pleased the widow he had failed in his more important object of making a good impression upon her daughter. What had seemed a few minutes ago to be such a happy thought had turned out, in short, rather a ludicrous fiasco.

'We are very quiet people, you know, Mr. Adair,' pursued the hostess, 'and don't give dinner parties; but perhaps you will come to tea with us some evening, and we will try and get some clever people like yourself—perhaps Mr. Mavors—to meet you.'

Adair stammered his thanks. He was overwhelmed, not only with the charming prospect of this entertainment, but by the consciousness that Miss Helford was agitated by inward mirth.

What a muddle-headed old woman this was, and what a fool he was, himself, to have blundered into her good graces in so absurd a fashion! His senses seemed absolutely deserting him; he forgot altogether the little scheme of conciliation that he had concocted, and was only bent upon getting out of the house without further disaster.

Mrs. Helford began to talk to him of the coming examinations (which, even with the ladies, in a university town, is a topic of conversation, if not of interest). 'We all know who is going to be senior wrangler this year. Do we not?' she observed, archly.

'Indeed!' he said. He had some idea it was some sort of riddle this dreadful old person was asking. 'I am sure I can't guess.'

'Now, I like that,' she said. She seemed, indeed, to like whatever he said; for which he didn't feel at all inclined to thank her. 'Modesty,' here again she glowered signifi-

cantly at Henny, 'is so rare among young men of the present day, and when it doesn't exist, there can be, to my mind, no true merit.'

By the pained look which passed over his younger companion's face, Adair felt that he was getting another knock-down blow. Had this girl, then, such a prejudice against him that she even wanted him to fail in the mathematical tripos! So far as Sophy was concerned, he was, as we are aware, by this time secure. But there was no knowing what effect antagonistic forces from without might still have upon his engagement. He had only the Canon upon his side—and Jeannette—for certain; Miss Aldred was but a doubtful ally. That Henny was hostile to him he now felt sure. When he thought how he had gone out of his way to win her good word, and all for nothing, he felt almost out of his mind with vexation. Hardly knowing what he was about, he snatched up his hat and

muttered something about reading and his private tutor.

'Quite right,' observed Mrs. Helford, approvingly, 'never neglect your studies. You must not forget your promise to take tea with us; tea stimulates the intellectual faculties, or I wouldn't ask you.'

He looked so distressed and worried when he took his leave that Henny felt real pity for him; as the drawing-room bell remained unanswered, she even went out into the little hall with him. Here, then, was an opportunity for saying something pleasant and plausible to her out of hearing of that marplot, her mother. But to Adair the chance had come too late, and he was unable to collect his faculties. As he stood on the doorstep, with her hand lightly held in his, he could think of nothing else to say than 'How is little Stevie?'

Anything more ludicrous than such an inquiry, considering the supposed object of

his call, and the whole previous conversation, it would be difficult to imagine ; but the fact was he had forgotten everything except his failure.

'Stevie!' she said, withdrawing her hand from his with some abruptness ; 'why, I thought you came on purpose to inquire about him?'

'So I did,' he said ; and, indeed, so he had done. Then, with some presence of mind induced by the urgency of the occasion, he added, 'The fact is, my dear Miss Helford, I am reading very hard. I can hardly recollect anything, except my problems, two minutes together.'

It was really a fine stroke of ingenuity, and so far it deserved to succeed. Unhappily for Mr. Adair, problems in Henny's mind did not hold so important a place as they might have done : if kindness and unselfishness had been 'subjects' in the Senate House she would have taken honours, but even the

highest mathematics were in her opinion mere simple addition as compared with little Stevie's state of health.

'You must be reading hard, indeed,' she answered coldly; 'I think a little too hard, Mr. Adair——Good morning.'

She did not actually tip him down the steps, but the door closed uncommonly close behind him. This was fortunate, for it prevented her from hearing an ejaculation which the extremity of the young man's chagrin forced from his lips; and which, if it did not actually express the situation, was not wanting in vehemence. It would have been pardonable enough, considering the weakness of human nature, if Henny Helford had gone back to her mother with a revised version of this incident, and the pertinent inquiry, 'What do you think of your precious *protégé now*?' But it was a curious characteristic of hers, whenever she felt indignation against a fellow-creature, to lock it in her own heart,

not to nurse it and keep it warm, but to prevent the fire spreading and doing the offending person an injury. Instead of returning to the drawing-room therefore (which was the way to temptation), she went straight upstairs to the child's sick-room, where it was impossible 'to let angry passions rise.'

Little Stevie had awakened from his sleep, and was sitting up in bed, with a sliding table before him, engaged in destroying Sebastopol with cannon; he was still very weak, and could only direct an ineffectual and languid fire (of dried peas) upon the fortifications. The mimic performance bade fair to rival the original in duration; but, for all that, it was plain that the invalid had made progress. He was an original little fellow, with everything in miniature about him except his eyes, which were larger than a grown man's, and had about ten times the ordinary amount of expression in them.

'Where have you been, Henny, dear?'

'Down in the drawing-room, love.'

'What did you go there for and leave me?' inquired this despot.

'Well, you were asleep, my darling, and I have been helping grandmamma to entertain visitors.'

'What visitors?'

'Mr. Adair.'

'Why do you call him visitors? He's not Mr. Adairs.'

'Quite right, Stevie. I ought to have said a visitor.'

Assuaged by this tribute to his superior sagacity and knowledge of the English language, Stevie ceased to be severe. He aimed a shot at the Mamelon, missed it, and, sinking back upon his pillow, exchanged warfare for the tender emotions.

'Dearest Henny, do you love Mr. Adair?' he inquired.

'No, Stevie, certainly not. Why do you ask such an extraordinary question?'

'But you love Freddy, don't you?'

'I hope so,' said Henny, blushing even in the presence of so tiny an auditor.

'When Freddy was staying in Cambridge, *he* used to come and call; and now Mr. Adair comes and calls,' said Stevie, with the air of one who entrenches himself in a strong logical position.

'But Mr. Adair came to call on grandmamma.'

'What did he do that for?' demanded Stevie, naïvely. 'She's not pretty.'

'What has that to do with it, Stevie?—though, indeed, she is very nice-looking for her age. You love her dearly, I am sure, though she does not happen to be young.'

'Oh, Mr. Adair loves *her*, does he! I see.'

This ridiculous statement, associating itself as it did with Frederic's fun about her having the young scholar for a father-in-law, almost upset Henny's gravity.

'You don't understand these matters, my dear,' she answered. 'Mr. Adair came here out of politeness, and also, as he *said*' (she could not help putting a little stress on the 'said'), 'to inquire after our little invalid. That's you, you know.'

'What is it?' inquired Stevie, with awakening interest. 'No more soldiers, I hope; I'm sick of soldiers. Is it a picture-book, a barking dog, or a windmill that goes round and round and round?'

'Mr. Adair did not bring any toy for you, Stevie; you must not always think of getting presents from everybody.'

'I don't believe Mr. Adair came to call on grandmamma,' said Stevie, resolutely. 'I don't believe he came to inquire after me. I am not contradicting you, Henny—I know it's rude to contradict—because you can't be sure of what he came for. You can only have guessed at it; now my guess is different.'

To this ultimatum, as argument with Stevie was impossible, and, moreover, forbidden by the doctor, Henny made no reply; but busied herself in putting the bed to rights and making the child comfortable.

'A woman may marry two husbands,' observed the irrepressible one presently. 'Mrs. Carver' (the charwoman) 'told me she had had two, and asked me to make the third, only I wouldn't.'

'What has that to do with Mr. Adair, you silly child?'

'Well, perhaps Mr. Adair and Fred both want to marry you.'

'Mrs. Carver's first husband must have died before she married her second,' explained Henny, preferring to discuss the general question rather than the case in point.

'I see; then, if I am right, Mr. Adair wishes Fred was dead.'

'My dear Stevie, you are talking great nonsense, and, what is worse, very wicked nonsense. Let me tell you once and for all—

for you chatter so to Mrs. Carver and everybody you come across, that there is no knowing what mischief you may make—that there is no question of Mr. Adair being in love with anybody. He has made a call, it is true, but he does not call on me as Fred used to do. I don't receive him alone, but only when grandmamma is at home. That makes all the difference.'

'I see, I've got it all now,' said Stevie. 'I understand what Mrs. Carver was driving at the other day when she was talking to nurse, and thought I was fast asleep. If you had received Mr. Adair "times and times" (as Mrs. Carver said) when grandmamma was known to be out of doors, that would show that you were in love with him.'

'I don't know about that, Stevie,' said Henny, smiling in spite of herself; 'but it would show that I ought to be, and I suppose that I should be engaged to marry him instead of Frederic.'

'Very well, then, I'll tell you a secret, Henny,' said Stevie, beckoning her close, so as to whisper in her ear, 'I don't know, as you say, whether she's in love with him or not, but Sophy is engaged to be married to Mr. Adair.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONSENT.

WITHIN a few minutes of her reception of Stevie's news, yet not before Adair had paid a flying visit to 'The Laurels'—in which, without saying a word of Mr. Mavor's offer, Sophy had suggested that the time was ripe for speaking to the Canon—Henny was in Sophy's boudoir. She could hardly give credence to her own ears, though, strange to say, the possibility of the child's being mistaken had never even crossed her mind. His intuition and apprehension of the slightest hint were marvellous; and, though the means through which he had obtained his information were humble, Henny well understood that it was not on that account to be mis-

trusted. Mrs. Carver's services were often engaged by Miss Aldred, and from members of that lady's establishment she might well have learnt matters that were unknown to its head. The knowledge which servants possess of what is 'going on' above stairs is only too comprehensive; they may be assured of many things that have never taken place, but they do know what *has* happened.

'My dearest Sophy,' said Henny, gravely, 'is this true which a little bird has told me' (she did not say what a very callow bird it was) 'about you and Mr. Adair?'

'Yes, dear.'

The answer was distinct and decisive enough, but there was no joy in its assurance. How very different was its tone, as Henny could not but reflect, from that in which she herself had announced to her friend her own engagement to Mr. Irton!

'Then I suppose, my darling, I may congratulate you,' said Henny. 'I only hesitate

to do so,' she said, conscious of some shortcoming in her tone, 'because you may not like my knowing of it. Oh, Sophy, why didn't you tell me?'

'Mr. Adair—I mean John—wished it to be kept secret a little longer' (this was scarcely true; it was Sophy herself who had counselled delay); 'but I don't mind your knowing it, darling. There is nothing covert—or, or—underhand about the matter.'

'Underhand! I should think not. I'm sure my Sophy would do nothing of that kind.'

Sophy smiled and shivered.

'Mr. Adair is such a favourite of the Canon's that it is certain to please him,' continued Henny. 'What a clever husband you will have, Sophy! At one time I used to be quite afraid of Frederic for that very reason. Those lines of the "In Memoriam" used always to be coming into my head—

> He reads the secret of the star,
> He threads the labyrinth of the mind;

and, of course, Mr. Adair knows more about the stars than even Frederic. But what does it matter, as I have found out, how clever men may be as compared with us poor women, if they only really love us?'

'No, I suppose it doesn't matter much,' murmured Sophy.

'It doesn't matter at all, my dear. No man wants a fool for a wife, of course. Though she may not understand half *he* understands, she must understand *him*, and be able to sympathise with him. But as for knowing Greek, and Algebra, and things, Frederic tells me (and I believe him) that he loves me all the better because I know nothing about them. He says such women are admirable on platforms and most useful on boards; but for domestic life he prefers a little ignoramus like myself. Not that I am comparing my small wits with yours, dear,' said Henny, with a sudden flush. 'They are not to be mentioned in the same breath, I

know. Only Mr. Adair is such a very great mathematician that I thought you might be a little afraid of him.'

Again Sophy smiled and shivered. Henny had inadvertently struck a very tender chord, though it was not of Mr. Adair's mathematics that her friend stood in fear.

'And when is it to be, my darling?' inquired Henny, after a little pause.

'Not till Mr. Adair has taken his degree.'

'I suppose not, indeed. Why that means that it may be within six months. Dear me,' sighed Henny, 'how nice it must be to be rich! That saying about the course of true love never running smooth does not apply to such as you. It is not only that you have only to wish to have your desire gratified, but, "Hey, Presto!" it is done upon the instant. Oh, Sophy, you ought to be a very happy girl.'

'Ought I?' answered Sophy, wearily.

'Then if I am not so, I suppose it is because I never am what I ought to be.'

'But you *are* happy, are you not, dearest?' inquired Henny, with affectionate earnestness.

'Oh, yes; at all events quite as happy as I deserve to be.'

'If that is really so, I should be well satisfied,' said Henny, still more tenderly. 'But, Sophy, is it not rather soon—I don't mean your marriage, but your engagement. That is'—here she hesitated.

'You mean rather soon after the other,' put in Sophy, gravely.

'Oh, no, I didn't mean that,' said Henny, turning crimson. 'I was sure all along that there was nothing serious—it was only that you tried to persuade yourself that there was —in the former matter. I should not have dreamt of alluding to such a thing. When I said soon I meant quickly. You have known Mr. Adair such a very little time, you see.'

'That's true, quite true,' assented Sophy,

slowly. 'Yet I think I know him pretty well.'

Henny was silent. Her friend's manner, joined to the opinion she had formed for herself of this new suitor, alarmed her; she knew by experience that expostulation was of little use with Sophy, and to hint her doubts of Mr. Adair, since things had gone so far, could only do harm and no good.

'One cannot expect, you know,' continued Sophy, with a smile, 'that all young men can come up to the standard of your Frederic.'

'Of course not,' said Henny, naïvely.

'Mr. Adair, I am well aware, is not so handsome as Mr. Irton is; he has not such a lively wit, and therefore does not shine to such advantage in society. But my guardian thinks he has some solid qualities, and such as are calculated to make him a good husband.'

Henny Helford stared at her friend in

silence. To her it would have appeared strange enough if any girl had spoken to her of the qualifications of her future husband in a similar strain, but that Sophy, the most impulsive of all girls she had ever known, should take so cold and practical a view of the matter—as though she had accepted this man upon the faith of the Canon's recommendation rather than from any convictions of her own—was simply amazing.

However, it was clear that the thing was settled, and beyond criticism: nothing remained, therefore, but to make the best of it.

In answer to other inquiries, Sophy informed her that Mr. Adair's intentions with respect to an educational calling had been definitely given up. His plan was to endeavour to obtain some situation in London, in an actuary's office or elsewhere, where his peculiar gifts might be utilised.

'His marriage will be a great waste, of course,' observed Sophy, calmly, 'considering

that he would be quite certain of his Fellowship.'

And this again Henny thought was not only a strange thing for an expectant bride to say, but also one quite out of accord with her friend's character. A great change had certainly taken place in it, or she had utterly misjudged it from the first. The real truth did not strike her; namely, that some of these ideas—especially the last one—were not her own.

'And when is your guardian to be informed of your engagement, my darling, since at present, as I understand, he is in ignorance of it?'

'Well, as it happens, Mr. Adair is going to speak with him this very day.'

'I am glad of that. I mean I am glad that it is not to be kept a secret from him,' said Henny. 'You feel sure of his consent, I suppose?'

'Quite sure,' said Sophy. Her tone was quiet, almost to coldness, but very decisive.

Except some rather conventional congratulations and some most earnest and genuine wishes for her friend's future happiness, there was really nothing more for Henny to say.

Sophy had good grounds for her conviction that the Canon would offer no opposition. Adair had laid his plans with too great skill to fear anything of the kind; but he omitted no precaution to ensure success. Nothing could be more modest and apparently diffident than the terms in which he made confession of having fallen in love with the Canon's ward. He acknowledged that his having done so was an act open to censure; he could even imagine—considering the disparity of means between himself and Miss Gilbert—that it might be considered a breach of hospitality. If that was the view entertained by his patron, sooner than lose his good opinion he was prepared—though at a

sacrifice of happiness which no one could estimate but himself—to give up all pretensions to the young lady's hand. He confessed that he had reason to believe that his affection was reciprocated, but notwithstanding that, and supposing, in case of the Canon's objecting to the match, that she preferred to obey the voice of authority rather than that of love, he would then bow to her decision and never trouble her with importunity or appeal.

Perhaps it was not altogether unnecessary that Adair adopted a course so judicious and conciliatory, for, though the Canon had already pictured to himself the young man as Sophy's suitor, the idea had been almost confined to the regions of imagination: when it had escaped from them and been put into formal shape, as in his conversation with his sister, its reception had not been favourable, and it had seemed less satisfactory to himself; and, now that it started up suddenly before him full grown, like Minerva, it gave him a

considerable shock. It is all very well for a kind, thoughtful man, independent of conventionality, to advance (in fancy) humble merit to high places; but when humble merit advances itself without assistance, and then demands his sanction to the transaction, he is sometimes apt to think the step a little audacious.

'If, as I gather from what you say, Adair,' was the Canon's grave reply, 'you have already spoken to my ward upon this subject, I confess I think you have done wrong. It was to me, and not to her, that you should have addressed yourself.'

There was a pause which Adair purposely prolonged, though he had, in truth, long prepared his reply. Then he answered, humbly,

'As to that, sir, I have not a word of excuse to offer. I might plead, perhaps, some extenuating circumstances; but I do not do so. I was wrong.'

This was a sagacious reply; for what it

implied was that Adair had only so addressed himself upon receiving such encouragement as few young men could be expected to withstand; but as for putting in that plea, not even wild horses should have torn it from him. The Canon, with Sophy's behaviour to Herbert Perry in his mind, fell into this trap at once. He was vexed and bit his lip; but where such complete submission was made, contention was impossible.

'Your communication has taken me very much by surprise,' he said: 'I cannot say that it gives me—ahem—unmixed satisfaction.'

'It would be, indeed, surprising if it did, sir,' was Adair's rejoinder. 'I am well aware that what I have said must seem presumptuous, indeed, even audacious.'

'Nay, nay,' put in the Canon, touched by his young favourite's humility. 'I don't say that. The absence of Fortune and Family is, of course, a serious drawback; but Blood and

Money are not everything. As to the latter, you have the material within you, if I am not much mistaken, by which nowadays fortunes are made; and I believe you to be a man of sterling merit. My ward has some money of her own, which will be always hers; no one else can touch it. So far her fortune is secured. And you are not a man to sit with your hands before you and live on your wife's income.'

'I should be ashamed, indeed, to do that, sir. It is very difficult for a person in my position to excuse without accusing himself; but I should like you to feel that Miss Gilbert's fortune has formed no part of her attraction for me.'

'I am glad to hear it, and I believe it,' said the Canon, earnestly. 'In case of your engagement being a short one—and, upon the whole, I should prefer a short engagement—you will be giving up something not inconsiderable, yourself. You will only gain your

Fellowship, in fact, to lose it; that is 250*l.* a year or so.'

'I hope I shall be able to make 250*l.* a year, sir, by my own exertions,' answered Adair, with a smile of confidence.

'No doubt, no doubt; still, as a matter of fact, you would give up that much.'

The Canon was not replying to his young friend so much as to certain other persons not present, to whom he felt it would be necessary to advance 'extenuating circumstances;' not only to take this young man's side, but to present the view of the matter as seen from his standpoint.

'So far as the mere money is concerned,' he went on, 'you may be considered as the working partner, who, though he brings no capital to the concern, contributes the brains.'

This was a dangerous metaphor, because it suggested that Adair, under certain circumstances, might have the use of the capital; but the Canon was unaware of the significance

of his own speech, and though it struck Adair, he took no notice of it.

'Of course, there will be a great deal of consideration—yes—and consultation,' he resumed; 'and even if I take my ward's wishes in this matter for granted, Mr. Adair, I can say nothing for certain respecting this proposal at present.'

'Indeed, sir, I feel very grateful that you should take the matter into consideration at all,' returned the young man, gravely. 'It is quite as much as I could have dared to hope for. But as to consulting others, I trust entirely, next to Miss Gilbert's regard for me, to your own view of my character; it may be much too kind a one—indeed, I feel it to be so; but the truth is, sir, I have not the qualities that win popularity, and elsewhere I can scarcely look for favour. Poverty and friendlessness are passports to your good-will; that is not, however, the case with the world at large, sir, but far otherwise.'

'You shall have fair play, Adair, you may be sure of that,' said the Canon, assuringly. 'I shall not be persuaded to do you the least injustice.'

There was another prolonged pause. Adair, convinced that he had obtained his end, was unwilling to break ground in any direction. The more, too, he left his companion to his own reflections, the more likely he felt he would be to regard the matter as a *fait accompli.*

'In case this marriage should take place,' continued the Canon, thoughtfully, 'I suppose you young people would be rather in a hurry. I have myself said that I am averse to any long engagement, but there must be nothing to distract the mind, such as a honeymoon, before the Tripos. You must take your degree, you know, since your position in the examinations will form your future credentials.'

'I quite understand that, sir,' returned

the young man, quietly. 'Moreover, I should like to win my spurs—to distinguish myself in the only way that for the present lies in my power—for—for—Sophy's sake.'

'That is well said,' observed the Canon, gently.

'There is another reason also, which you may be sure, sir, would prevent any precipitation in this matter,' continued Adair, earnestly. 'I should not dream of deserting my colours as regards the Concordance. That must be finished before everything.'

To a worldly wise man this *argumentum ad hominem* would have been too transparent; but the Canon, who had the intelligence of twenty ordinary men, was deficient in mere sharpness. His nature (where he liked people) was confiding in the extreme; and to suspect them of self-interest, especially when their actions suggested self-sacrifice, would have seemed to him a baseness.

'Thank you, Adair,' he said. 'It is not

every man who, under such circumstances, would have given a thought to another's convenience. I should certainly like to see our work complete before you enter into that state' (here he smiled, as he always did when a pleasantry was impending) 'which I hope, for both your sakes, will be a complete Concordance.'

It was a bold stroke of Mr. John Adair's; but it succeeded, and gave the *coup-de-grâce* to any lingering objections which may still have existed in his companion's mind. 'A man who had such consideration for the interests of his friend' (for the Canon never thought of himself as a patron) 'would surely,' was his reflection, 'make a tender and unselfish husband. It would be a great thing to have settled Sophy in life, and mated with a man who possessed the one thing she wanted—ballast. It was also very satisfactory to feel that the Concordance was provided for.'

Though the Canon had thus made up his mind, it was not free from qualms as respected the opposition which his consent to Adair's offer was likely to meet with. He expected some epigrammatic disapprobation from Mr. Mavors, and a word or two of quiet but decided condemnation from his sister. But in this, as it turned out, he was agreeably disappointed. Sophy herself, it was true, did not exhibit much enthusiasm when he informed her that her lover's prayer was granted. She was very far from being unmoved, but her feelings seemed to take a retrospective direction.

She threw herself upon her guardian's neck, and poured out her very heart in gratitude for his long-continued kindness to her. It would have seemed to a less unegotistic nature that she grieved more at parting from so true and tried a friend than she rejoiced at the happiness that was awaiting her. There was no doubt, however, of her having

plighted faith with the young scholar; and, on the whole, the Canon was not displeased that she displayed no raptures at the prospect before her. Such subdued bliss, he philosophically concluded, was more likely to last.

Mr. Mavors received the intelligence without one word of criticism or comment. It was not, as his friend was well aware, an example of silence giving consent; but it was something that he forbore to speak his mind. He seemed to be quite prepared for the news and to bow to the inevitable. All he said was, 'I hope with all my heart that Miss Sophy may be happy.'

Miss Aldred exhibited considerably more surprise, but also abstained from any expression of opinion.

'You know, William,' she observed, gravely, 'where I wished her choice to fall; but since she has made her own election, I have not a word to say against it.'

Her private thoughts were, however, a

little different. Though she had no suspicion of the actual state of the case, she had misgivings that matters had gone further between Sophy and the late Mr. Herbert Perry than they had appeared to have done; and the transference of that young lady's affections to Mr. John Adair seemed to her to be indecorously rapid. 'I am afraid,' she sighed to herself, 'that our poor Sophy has not much heart.'

Unhappily, she was mistaken; whatever her faults, Sophy had a very tender one; and it is those who have tender hearts who give the real hostages to Fortune, and, tied to her stake like some poor beast for baiting, have to endure her sharpest scourge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AFTER FIVE YEARS.

A POET, who got a pension for it (and not undeservedly), once described the changes wrought in human life by ten years. In a lustrum even—five years—there is often change enough (as may well happen when the events of half an hour may divert the whole current of our being). Within that space the boy becomes a man, the girl a matron, the man of middle life joins the seniors, the senior totters on the verge of the tomb. In five years the shortest term of penal servitude expires, and one becomes once again a free man; in five years, with exceptional good fortune, a marrying man

may have four honeymoons (I know one who had three during that period, and spent them all in the Isle of Wight). In five years about one-fifth of the human race leaves this world for good, or at all events, for good and all. Within this period, now supposed to have passed, the personages of our little drama have partaken of the common lot. The Canon, though as bright and hale as ever, is grown grey. Miss Aldred wears a *pince nez* on her dear nose. Mr. Mavors is very much aged, which the Canon affects to resent extremely. He says it is not fair to him, since those who consult the Cambridge calendar, and find the Tutor and he are contemporaries, draw the false deduction that he himself must be getting on in years. He feels, on the contrary, more youthful than ever, since Robert is coming home from India.

Since we saw him last, indeed, he has had little to age him. None of those body blows which Fate so often administers to us just

as we are growing weak and unfit for combat with her, and which, as it were, 'double us up,' so that we walk with a stoop for the brief remainder of our days. Nay, the blind-fold lady has shown him favour. The Aldred edition of Milton has been, if not a financial success, 'very well received by the critics,' and the Concordance has even paid its own expenses. What can a man of letters (who is not a literary man by profession, his one eye bent on fame and the other on the main chance) look for more? The Canon is more than satisfied. He has large-paper copies of each work with uncut edges. The Milton is dedicated to his old college chum, Reginald Mavors. The Concordance contains a hand-some acknowledgment of the invaluable assistance rendered to him by 'his young friend John Adair, scholar of Trinity and second wrangler of his year.'

Adair, though he had always No. 1 in his view, was obliged to yield that place in the

Tripos to another, and thereby disappointed one genuine friend and a great many backers. The Canon always felt that his Concordance had something to do with his failure in this matter, which was sufficient in itself to place him under an obligation to the young man for life. On the other hand, it might well have been that the thoughts of his approaching marriage diverted Adair's mind from the study of those high mathematics which demand an undivided allegiance. However, next to being senior wrangler is to be second wrangler; and though such academic distinctions have not so much weight with the world at large as in educational circles, they have still a material value. At all events, aided no doubt by the Canon's influence, Adair obtained a certain situation in London in the office of a leading actuary, which only a great university reputation could have secured for one so young. The position did not prove to be permanent, but the reasons

which caused him to remove elsewhere seemed amply sufficient. He threw in his lot with a firm of rising stockbrokers, thereby acquiring a small share of its profits, and within the last year or two he had been made a partner in the concern. There had been some liabilities and difficulties in the last arrangement, but they had been surmounted, by what means will be presently disclosed.

Upon the whole, the Canon had no reason to regret his ward's alliance with so able and diligent a man of business as Adair had proved himself to be. The young man had always treated him with the same respect and esteem which he had shown as his assistant and amanuensis, and indeed, of late, with an effusive demonstration of regard that seemed somewhat foreign to his character, but which a certain exceptional kindness on the other's part had not unreasonably evoked. In appearance Adair had changed but little; he had never looked juvenile, and now seemed no older than in his college days; his thought-

ful face wore a still keener and more shrewd expression, and his manner upon occasions was more masterful than it had wont to be, but that was all. Sophy, on the other hand, was much altered. She was still sweetly pretty —to the eye that looks beyond the merest externals, even prettier than she had been ; but the sprightliness which had once formed her most striking charm had fled. She had a trouble of which every one knew, sufficient to account for this. The only offspring of her marriage, a little child now four years old, was an invalid and a cripple. It was a girl, but her pet name (the only one she was known by) was Willie. She had been named Wilhelmina, the nearest feminine approach to the Canon's William, in spite of his own remonstrance against so outlandish a choice. It was impossible to refuse his consent to his ward's entreaties—she made them upon the first occasion of his coming to see her after she became a matron ; a more charming and tender spectacle, he thought, had never met his

eye than this young mother, pale, and frail as a lily, with that bud of a baby beside her.

'My dearest guardian, if your name were Maher-Shalal-Hash-baz,' she said, with a touch of her old manner, 'I should call her Maher-Shalal-Hash-baz after you. How can it be otherwise? Whom should I wish her to remind me of so much as your dear self?'

Of course it had been open to him to reply, 'Well, your husband, for instance.' But that was an argument which, even if he had been inclined to argue the matter, would, perhaps, hardly have occurred to him. To say the truth, it would hardly have suggested itself to anybody that babies were (at all events in the usual sense) much in Adair's way. To so calculating a mind—I do not say so mathematical a one, for I have known mathematicians who disregard nothing because of its smallness, and who are the tenderest of human souls—a baby formed only a fractional portion of humanity, and did not

represent an integer at all. Adair, like many a better man, did not even profess to care for such very small deer. He looked upon them as persons careful of their time regard a shrimp—not worth the trouble it entails upon the consumer; though in his case the case was of course reversed; he was the producer. This paternal indifference prompted well-meaning folk to comfort Sophy with the assurance that when Willie became a little bigger her husband would make up for all previous shortcomings in the way of affection to her; a prophecy which she received in total silence.

Jeannette, who was still in attendance upon her mistress, was by no means so sanguine as these comforters. 'He takes no more notice of it,' she once angrily exclaimed in Sophy's hearing, 'than if it had been somebody else's.' And to this, too, though it was clear that when she said 'somebody' she meant a particular person, Sophy answered not one syllable.

Another great change in her was that there was 'no murmur at the door so constant on its hinge before.' All her lively talk had ceased. Even when that sad accident took place which crippled her child in all human probability for life, and at the same time made it too likely that that life would be a brief one, she had said but little, and murmured not at all. Perhaps she thought it but a righteous judgment upon her, poor soul, for certain sins of hers. And yet (so she thought, and so Jeannette said) it might have been prevented. Although it has been shown that Mr. John Adair could be liberal enough upon occasion, the occasions were all in connection with his personal interests: in matters outside them, he practised a rigid economy. His domestic expenditure, except where it came immediately under the public eye, was conducted on the most provident principles. The wages he considered ample for the nursemaid of his only child

were not such as to cause any very brisk competition even in that overstocked market, and resulted in the appointment of one who was almost a child herself. Sophy and Jeannette, it is true, were in constant attendance upon little Willie (who was to her mother all that now could be considered gain on earth, and well-nigh made up for all her loss); but sometimes it was necessary to entrust the little treasure to this hireling. And the hireling had dropped her. What was worse, she did not think it worth while to mention the fact; and when it was found out the mischief had gone too far for mending. Jeannette afterwards expressed her opinion that, beside the limb of the poor child, there took place on that occasion another breakage—its mother's heart.

At all events, Sophy's life from that moment was passed on 'a broken wing.' She never reproached her husband, for when remonstrance is unavailing, reproach is vain

indeed, while to others she kept silence on that matter—as on all the rest. Jeannette, too, though so free-tongued to her mistress, said nothing against her master without doors, for her mistress' sake. He believed the girl to be his ally ; for, indeed, had she not been subsidised, purchased ? Her talent for intrigue had wrought mischief enough, as she was by this time well aware, and all the reparation she could make, to her whom she truly loved and had so unwittingly harmed, was to use that talent in her service. No one outside its walls knew what went on in that pleasant house in Albany Street, where nice little dinners were given (for the kitchen expenses were by no means conducted upon the same lines as those of the nursery), and agreeable company not seldom visited, and where especially everything was *couleur de rose* when the Canon and Miss Aldred came up to town to stay with the young people.

There was one sin of which the master of

that house could never be accused—namely, that of idleness! He was a diligent worker; and, though of excellent business habits, he never worked in a groove. His fault, indeed, lay in the other direction; he was a schemer, and a bold one, and his schemes absorbed him.

It was a great mitigation to Sophy's married life that she saw but little of her husband. To the readers of this history who have been admitted behind the scenes it would be superfluous indeed to say that she did not love him. She had never loved him even at the best—that is to say, when she had seen but little of him; and it was not likely that love had grown from knowledge. A great poet has described in his youth the good effect of offspring in bringing husband and wife together who have otherwise nothing in common; had he been more mature, I sometimes doubt whether he would have taken that view. I have noticed in such cases that

all the pent-up love of one or the other has passed into the tiny channels thus opened to it, without overflow : the bed of the stream remains dry. At all events, where the children touch the heart of one only of the parents, these are thereby by no means drawn nearer to one another ; on the contrary, the one resents the other's indifference to their common offspring, and the other is jealous of the new-born love that was denied to himself. The reflection 'half is his and half is mine' never occurred to Sophy as she clasped her fragile darling to her heart. Willie was God's gift to her, not her husband's, who not only did not prize, but had maimed it. It is thought in certain well-meaning but unintelligent circles, that high spirits with the young should be discouraged ; that a lively wit savours of irreligion ; and that the world stands less in need of smiles than tears. These good folk would have been gratified by the alteration in 'airy, fairy' Sophy, who

had certainly been reformed in that respect, if not converted.

Yet it gave Henny Helford—who was good, too, in her way, though not goody-goody—the heartache. Not a word did Sophy drop to her of those domestic troubles at which we ourselves have only guessed; but she read them in her face, her eyes, her form, as no others—not even Aunt Maria—read them. Henny's own sky, though it had plenty of sunshine, was not an unclouded blue. She had been wedded to her Frederic for three years, but no child had blessed their union. It is one of the many stumbling-blocks in the way of the optimist to see a wife like Henny, whose very knees, one might say, were made for children to cling to, without offspring. An eminent conversationalist living by himself is a deplorable spectacle, but that is only a waste of power; he might, too, be living with persons who didn't appre-

ciate him. But when one considers the heaps of women who have children they don't want, and don't know what to do with, Henny's case seems very hard. Frederic was getting on in his profession, so that a baby more or less would have been no strain upon his resources, and, as these increased, it was interesting to remark how much he was approved of even by those who had not been hasty in their appreciation—as, for example, by his mother-in-law. Mrs. Helford had always been made welcome to her son-in-law's house; but at first it could scarcely be said that she had laid herself out to make herself agreeable there. She had thrown out little hints of the results of too lavish expenditure, which had only annoyed her host because they frightened Henny; but as soon as she clearly perceived there was no reason for them she frankly acknowledged the advantage of being thoroughly comfortable on a safe basis,

and had even a secret consciousness that it was better than being ruined by the best of sons. Stevie was by this time at school, having quite got rid of his ailments, and showing no sign of his early delicacy, so that the old lady (as we may now venture to call her) was glad enough to exchange her solitary home for that of her son-in-law, though she still kept up her house at Cambridge 'to receive the dear boy when he came home from the holidays' (which he always spent with his aunt), and 'to give dearest Henny a change' which she seldom took. In the long vacation, Irton, like other lawyers (except that he carried his wife with him), fled across the Channel for a thorough change, and returned to his modest residence in Maida Vale with a thankful heart, and the conviction that there was no place worth living in but England. Such was, in brief, the changed condition of the personages of our little

drama, wrought by five years; upon the whole, not very momentous ones; but fated to be succeeded by more eventful days—an adjective which, though apparently neutral, too seldom, alas! augurs sunshine.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SHADOW OF TROUBLE.

Now that Sophy was gone, the Canon spent less of his time in his college rooms and more of it at home than had been his wont, out of consideration for his sister. Aunt Maria felt the absence of her young companion very much, notwithstanding that she had been so long accustomed to it. If she could have been certain that Sophy was happy in her married life, this would doubtless have been less the case; but she had her suspicions, though she did not communicate them to others, that this was not so. To her brother she would not have revealed them upon any account, as she well knew they

would have filled him with remorse for the part he had taken in the matter; he had favoured Adair, and favoured him still, though their intercourse of late had been interrupted. Like thousands of other good women, it was Miss Aldred's constant endeavour to make life easy to the man to whom she was devoted. Only a woman can understand what a sacrifice it was of her own feelings and impulses thus to keep silence; but she kept it. She walked a good deal, read a good deal, and played Russian Patience a good deal—using only six parcels of cards to get her four suits, or sometimes a seventh, when no human eye was watching her.

On a certain winter evening the Canon was sitting with her as usual—but not, as usual, at his books. The day's newspaper, too, lay rejected upon his knee; he was reading, for the third or fourth time, a letter that had come that afternoon from his darling boy. He was coming home, though not imme

diately; and, strange to say, the delay lay at the Canon's door. Robert did not wish to leave India till he had got a reply to this very letter, which, among other matters, put a question of great importance to himself.

'It is now five years ago, my dear father, as you will perhaps recollect, since I mentioned to you the name of Alma Treherne. From a boy, as I then was, with my foot on the first rung of the ladder of promotion, such a communication must have seemed wild and premature indeed; but you replied to it, like yourself, with patience and kindness. You did not laugh at me, nor even discourage me, but left matters to time. I have written to you upon the same subject so often, that in the case of any one else I should have felt that I must be growing tedious; but after five years I find myself loving Alma more than ever. During that space of time she has declined many much better offers for my sake, and doubtless many better men; but

none who loved her as I do, for that (as it seems to me) is impossible. My position, as regards finances, is much improved by my having obtained the adjutancy, but not sufficiently so to obtain the General's consent to our marriage. Neither of us blame him; life in India is different from life at home. The notion of living comfortably upon a moderate income is entertained by very few people, and by no one in the Brigadier's position. He asks me bluntly enough, though not with personal disfavour, what are my expectations, and especially what sort of allowance my father can make me. To this, of course, I can give no answer, and must wait your reply. I cannot say how it distresses me to make such an application to you. I am aware that you have many expenses, and little to spare; but a little, with what I have of my own, will now suffice. If I thought I should be in any way crippling you, or depriving you of a single comfort, or even the means of gratifying

your own generous and benevolent disposition, I should feel I was procuring my own happiness at too great a price. It will be only waiting a little longer till my prospects have improved, as they must needs do ; for I am sure of Alma, and Alma is sure of me. You will not, I am sure, imagine, when I say that my return to England will depend on your reply, that I am suggesting that as a reason for your acceding to my request. I know how much you wish to see me, by my own vehement desire to see you ; but I am not base enough, I hope, to make use of your affection for me as a lever to gain my own ends. I am quite certain you will help me if you can, but if you cannot (which is quite possible), I shall be content to shake the pagoda-tree till I have got rupees enough to satisfy the General, when I shall bring Alma home, to find another father in your dear self.'

There was much more to the same effect ; the whole letter was full of love and con-

fidence and filial consideration. It would have gladdened any father's heart: but that of the Canon fairly leapt for joy, not only from the consciousness of his Robert's worth, but of his own ability to ensure the young fellow's happiness. Without going into details with respect to his own finances, he was quite confident that he should be able to allow his son an annual income which would considerably exceed the young man's modest expectations, and also to satisfy the General as regarded his future son-in law's prospects. It has been often said that there is no real happiness in wealth, which, in the case of vast riches, is doubtless true enough; but the possession of an income, with a surplus that admits of our giving happiness to others, is nevertheless a very pleasant thing. If the surplus is small, and it is rather a squeeze to spare it, the feelings of the giver (though to some persons this will seem incredible) are still more to be envied. As the Canon, looking straight be-

fore him, saw his way to depriving himself of certain pleasures so as to produce the requisite funds for his son, a smile stole over his face, like the evening sun upon an autumn landscape.

Aunt Maria, looking up from her cards, perceived it. 'I believe, my dear William,' she said, slily, 'that you have read that letter of Robert's seven times.'

'I believe, my dear Maria,' was the Canon's quiet retort, 'that you have taken eight packs to do that game.'

'No, William, only seven; I confess to seven.'

'If you confess to seven, you must have had nine'

'I did nothing of the kind, sir; moreover, I managed for the last time with only six.'

'That was when I was not looking, which accounts for the statement.'

'You are very rude, sir; you will not be fit to speak to when your Robert comes

home, since the very thought of it renders you so audacious; I shall get Alma, however, on my side, against you both. I mean to teach her bézique.'

'Poor girl,' murmured the Canon, pitifully.

To this impertinence Aunt Maria made no rejoinder, and the Canon, putting his son's letter in his breast-pocket next his heart, took up the newspaper from his knees.

Up to this time brother and sister had had no secrets from each other, unless that somewhat imprudent laxity on Aunt Maria's part in the matter of Herbert Perry could be called so. She thoroughly understood her brother's devotion to his son, and appreciated it; she was not a whit jealous, and thought it only natural she should be No. 2 in the Canon's mind, and his Robert No. 1. Like many others of her sex, she had very little of No. 1 in her composition. Her brother's tastes and occupations were not in her line;

but if she did not sympathise with them, she respected them. And he, on his part, recognised her many virtues, and loved her with that love which so rarely lives to be old—the love which children bear to one another who

> At one dear knee have proffered vows,
> One lesson at one look have learnt.

After all the changes and chances of half a century, Maria was the same to him as when they went hand in hand to their dame's school together.

They had talked over Robert's letter and agreed what was to be done as to certain retrenchments (not of a very serious kind, however), and if the lad had been her own son instead of being only her nephew, Aunt Maria could not have been more eager for sacrifice. Barclay, the butler, was to go, for one thing, and be succeeded by a parlour-maid; a circumstance, though she had some domestic pride about her, which the lady of the house only grieved for upon Barclay's

account, and probably (since he was sure of a good place elsewhere) much more than Barclay.

I linger over the quiet and unruffled happiness of this mature couple, because there is trouble in store for them. Oh, why, one asks (but despairing of reply), is Black Care suffered to perch upon dovecotes such as this, while the hawk's nest (full of the bones of the innocent) and the vulture's filthy lair remain so often unshadowed by his presence? If there is no future wherein such things are remedied, the Atheist's sneer, 'There is a little mismanagement somewhere,' is justified indeed.

As the Canon ran his eye down the paper (with particular attention to the publisher's column, where a new edition of 'Aldred's Concordance of Milton' was conspicuous), it suddenly lit upon something which compelled an ejaculation.

'My dear William! what is the matter?'

exclaimed Aunt Maria, alarmed, for to her ear there had been vexation and even apprehension in her brother's tone.

'I've got the pins and needles,' said the Canon, stretching out his leg and rubbing it. It was a lie; but the Recording Angel, so far from putting it down (as in a certain case we wot of) on the debit side of the account, and erasing it with a tear, put it down to the Canon's credit; for that lie could do no one any harm, and was uttered to save a fellow-creature pain.

'You've quite put me out,' said Aunt Maria, with irritation. 'I really must have one packet more.'

Then there was a silence, broken only by the fall of the cards.

Not a sheet of the newspaper was turned over; the Canon's gaze was fixed upon a single item—it was amongst the advertisements—which he read again and again, but always with a keener pang.

What that advertisement really meant to the poor Canon, if he could have foreseen the end of it, was a personal catastrophe; to use a vulgar but expressive phrase, it 'spelt ruin.' But at the moment (and for long afterwards) he did not connect the matter with himself at all; it annoyed and alarmed him very much, but solely on account of others who were dear to him, and whom alone it seemed to menace. Most men under such circumstances would have behaved with more philosophy: the Devil showed his knowledge of mankind in general when, after afflicting Job without much effect by proxy—that is, only in the persons of his belongings—he observed 'Skin for skin, let me touch himself, and then we shall see what he thinks of the fitness of things.' The Devil, however, like many other folk, generalises upon insufficient data; he knows next to nothing of good people, and had not even a bowing acquaintance with our friend the Canon.

After the first shock was over, 'I must keep this sorrow from poor Maria,' was this good fellow's main idea, and this, through all his subsequent reflections, he kept steadily in view. They were very sombre reflections, full of vague doubts and fears, and (this alone was certain) of keen disappointment. He had been deceived in one he respected; one also, it would have seemed to most men, whom he had favoured and assisted, and who had made a scurvy return, indeed, for all his benefits; but upon that part of the matter he laid no stress.

If Frederic Irton had happened to be at 'The Laburnums' he would have dropped in next door and conferred with him; but it was winter time, and the young lawyer was in town making honey (with a good deal of wax in it) in the legal line. Mr. Mavors, indeed, was in college, a firm and trusty friend, well qualified to be an adviser upon most matters; but there was a reason which

forbad the Canon to consult him in this particular instance. He was not sure (though indeed he might have been) that the other would be able to resist the temptation of saying, 'This is just what I expected all along.' At all events, his own apprehensions would only have derived corroboration from that source, and what he needed was comfort —*i.e.* to have them allayed.

It was necessary, therefore, that the Canon should go to the fountain-head whence these bitter waters came, and learn the worst at once; only a pretext was necessary to throw dust in the eyes of Aunt Maria. He was a very bad hand at duplicity; that idea of 'the pins and needles' had been but a mere happy inspiration. What excuse could he hit upon to get away from home without suspicion? Presently the evening post came in with a circular about somebody's goods which had to be disposed of (so it was stated, and in print too) at an alarming sacrifice. He perused it

with a great pretence of attention, and then, thrusting it into his pocket beside Robert's precious missive, exclaimed, 'Well, that is a nuisance. I am afraid I shall have to run up to town to-morrow to see Adair.'

'Dear me! and such very bad weather for travelling, my dear brother. Why shouldn't Mr. Adair come here; I suppose it's his business?'

'Oh, yes, it's his business,' returned the Canon, nursing this spark of truth; 'it isn't *my* business; but still I am comparatively an idle man' (he always used that word 'comparatively' in connection with his freedom from toil; he had a notion that he worked rather hard), 'and Adair is a very busy one. I am afraid I must go. If I go by the express I can get back by dinner-time.'

'Upon my word, William, I hope Mr. Adair is conscious of the trouble he gives you with his affairs, and is grateful for all your kind assistance to him.'

'Well, I suppose he knows it's for Sophy's sake, my dear,' returned the Canon, grimly.

'Then I hope he pays his debt of gratitude to Sophy. I am sometimes rather inclined to doubt it.'

Adair was not a favourite with Aunt Maria, as her brother knew; nevertheless, her tone, when taken in connection with that private matter he had in his mind, made the Canon uneasy.

'I hope, my dear, that you do not mean to suggest,' he said, 'that Adair and his wife do not get on happily together?'

'I don't go so far as to say that; she has never uttered a word of complaint to me, but I don't think he treats her with confidence. His mind seems to be always occupied, so that there is no room in it for his wife and child.'

'I suppose he has a great deal to think about.'

'Very likely; but he should think

about his affairs at his office, not bring them home with him. It would be excusable, perhaps, in the case of a person immersed in speculation; but with a steady business, such as he is concerned with, it is monstrous that he should come back silent and sullen, as if he had the cares of the world on his shoulders.'

'But how do you know all that, if Sophy has not told you?'

'Well, she has never dropped one single word to suggest the contrary—never spoken, that is, as a young wife who shares her husband's confidence always does speak of him to her own belongings. You and I, of course, never see the seamy side of Mr. Adair; he takes care when we are with him to be upon his best behaviour; but there are others who have better opportunities of judging, who give anything but a good report of him. I think it positively monstrous, William,' concluded Aunt Maria, energetically, 'that a man in

your position, and at your time of life, should be summoned up to town in such weather as this, with snow on the ground, to dance attendance upon Mr. John Adair.'

This last outburst comforted the Canon somewhat; it seemed to supply the key to much of Aunt Maria's enmity against Sophy's husband. Still her invectives increased his uneasiness with regard to the matter he had in hand.

As a rule, he slept the sleep of the just; but that night he had very little slumber, and awoke unrefreshed, to shave and dress by candle-light, which was obnoxious to a man of his habits. The general impression of inconvenience and being put about was quite overwhelmed, however, by more serious considerations.

The long cheerless journey in the train (except when he took out Robert's letter and read it again, which always acted as a cordial) was a very miserable business. Every crum-

pled rose-leaf to a man of his habit of life appears a thorn. Nor were things better with him when he found himself in the damp cab at the terminus. Having gone up with the intention of seeing Adair the first thing, it would have been very natural, one would have thought, for him to have driven straight to his office, but it was not natural to the Canon. He didn't like offices ; perhaps, too, he somewhat distrusted his own command of himself. He felt that he should be less likely to quarrel with his former *protégé* under the same roof with Sophy than in his City haunt. At all events, he drove to Albany Street, a very unexpected visitor.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

As places of business are closed to clients after office hours, so in private houses, unless they belong to persons who can afford to keep many servants, there are no arrangements for the reception of visitors until the usual time for callers. 'The man' is cleaning plate, 'the boy' is grinding the knives at the machine ; and one of the maids (if she is good-natured) will answer the door for such gentry. Thus it happened that the Canon, issuing, bag in hand, from his damp cab, was admitted by the amazed Jeannette.

'Lor, sir!' she said, with a warmth of welcome to her old master that thawed all the

proprieties, and briskly wiping her right hand with her apron, for she knew that he would shake it, 'who would have thought that it was you?'

'Well, I suppose no one: it's out of canonical hours, I know. Still, I suppose I shall be admitted.'

'Dear heart, how glad my poor mistress will be to see you!' was Jeannette's reply.

That word 'poor' slipped from her lips by accident—her astonishment at the sight of the unexpected visitor was too great to admit of any choice of expressions, but it did not escape the Canon's ear. The door of a sitting-room on one side of the little hall stood open, and he mechanically entered it, Jeannette as mechanically following him.

'Is anything the matter?' he inquired, in a hoarse, hushed voice.

'No, sir; no,' she answered (at once made conscious, by his tone, of her indiscretion). 'Things are going on much as usual;

Miss Sophy, that was, is not strong, but she keeps up, considering.'

'Considering what?'

'Well, the state of the poor child, sir; she is very delicate, and at best, I fear, will be a cripple for life.'

'That is sad, indeed,' said the Canon; but there was a sort of relief in his tone, for he had thought—only that Jeannette had changed front just in time to put the suspicion to flight—that she was referring to other matters not so patent as Willie's state of health.

'You see, sir, my mistress frets a bit, of course. She has the poor child always before her eyes, even when she is away from her, which hardly ever happens.'

'But is it worse?' inquired the Canon, using the neuter for the instant, because he was a man first and scholar afterwards.

'No, sir; not to say worse, but no better —and, in my mind, never will be. Good heavens, if she was to die!' murmured Jean-

nette, wringing her hands, 'I believe my mistress would die too.'

'Poor thing, poor soul; and even now she must be very lonesome!'

'Except Miss Henny, as was, sir, who is an angel, she sees no one.'

'But that is not right; she should encourage the visits of cheerful folk. She must have a weary time of it all day till her husband comes home.'

Jeannette did not reply to this. It was on the tip of her tongue to say, in that loyal and friendly presence, 'It would be much better if he never came home.' But, woman though she was, she withstood the temptation like a man. It would have been dangerous to be so candid with one himself so frank, and who might have quoted her to others. Still, her very silence, under the circumstances, was, to the Canon's eyes, only too significant. 'What time does Mr. Adair usually come home?' he said, pulling out his watch.

'Only just before dinner-time, between half-past six and seven—that is, when he *does* come home.'

A shadow fell upon the Canon's face. 'He does not often even dine with her, then,' was his reflection. 'I'll stay here to-night,' he murmured, thinking aloud. 'I am glad I brought my bag on the chance, and before I forget it I'll telegraph to Maria. Have you any telegraph forms in the house?'

'Forms! why bless you, sir, fifty. Mr. Adair is always telegraphing. We've all sorts, but of course you want an English one,' and she hurried out to get one.

What did this mean, that her master was always telegraphing, and on all sorts of forms? That he might do so from his office was natural enough, but from home? The Canon's forebodings grew darker and darker.

'You'll pardon my freedom, sir,' said Jeannette, returning, 'but if you have any bad news I hope you won't tell it to my

mistress. She has enough to bear already, with the poor child's illness.'

'I have no bad news, my girl. What should put that into your head?'

'Well, sir, I fancied you looked rather "down," and it is so important, the doctor told me, my mistress should be kept up. He gives her tonics and things; but then he might just as well bring her a penny whistle; better, because it would amuse the child.'

'Little Willie has plenty of toys, I hope?' said the Canon, writing his telegram, 'Detained till to-morrow by business,' &c.

'She has some as Mrs. Irton gives her, but Mr. Adair doesn't hold much with toys, and my mistress has little money of her own to spend on such things, as you are doubtless aware.'

Jeannette could not resist that little fling, and it was safe to indulge in it. Not only herself, but every one in the house knew that her master was 'mean' in money matters.

'I am not aware of anything of the kind,' said the Canon, forgetting prudence, and even the proprieties, in his vehement indignation. 'Whatever money your master has,' he was about to say, 'is your mistress's,' but he altered it just in time to, 'is your mistress's also; man and wife are one.'

'So they say, sir,' was the quiet rejoinder. 'I'll see that your telegram goes myself, sir,' she added in another tone. 'Will you please come upstairs to the drawing-room? the sight of you will do my mistress more good than all the tonics in the world!'

'I wish I could feel equally sure of that,' thought the Canon, with a sigh, as he reflected on the reason which had brought him up to town. 'I am afraid I bring but cold comfort.' He was thankful, however, that he had been thus forewarned by Jeannette, and determined within himself to let fall no hint of his apprehensions to her mistress.

A drawing-room well furnished but

without a fire in it in winter time is like a dandy without brains; two minutes of it is more than enough; if one's mission is melancholy, its effect is particularly depressing. 'I am all for show,' says the lace; 'I am all for shine,' says the gilt; 'a jolly good fire made of all these gewgaws, and an arm-chair that one could sit in would be infinitely preferable to them,' says the face of the visitor in the looking-glass. There was warmth enough, however, in Sophy's reception for him, for she came flying into the room with her arms extended, 'My dear, dear guardian!' she exclaimed, 'you are more welcome than words can say,' and she remained locked in his embrace for more than the usual time allowed for such transports. The Canon did not dare release himself, for he felt that she was weeping passionately on his breast, and the sight of a woman's tears, as we know, was terrible to him. He patted her little head encouragingly, but that seemed only to

make her worse; the very floodgates of her heart seemed to have been set wide.

'It is so foolish of me,' she presently sobbed, 'and so wicked of me; but I cannot, cannot help it. It seems so long since I have seen you, guardian; and you were always so good to me.'

'Pooh, pooh! Good to you, little woman! Why, of course I was good to you, as you call it. And I hope everybody else is good to you.'

She answered nothing, but her sobbing ceased at once: her thoughts seemed to have been turned into another channel.

'I have come up all of a sudden upon a little business matter to see your husband,' he continued; 'perhaps you will give me a bit of dinner and a bed.'

'Oh, yes, oh, yes; I am so very glad.'

'That's well. I am charged with all sorts of loving messages from your Aunt Maria, but have forgotten every one of them.

I only know she envied me the sight of you.'

'Dear heart, kind heart!' murmured poor Sophy.

To the Canon's ear it sounded like the cooing of a wounded dove.

'And now about the child, Sophy. How is little Willie? No worse, at all events, I trust?'

'I think not—I trust not. You shall see her at once. There is a fire in her room, which there should have been here. I quite forgot how cold you must be in my rapture at seeing you, and also how hungry. It is only twenty minutes, however, to luncheon-time.'

Sophy led him up into a back room in which there were two beds. The child was sitting on Jeannette's lap, looking at a picture-book; but, on seeing her mother, struggled down. As she ran across the nursery floor she fell. Sophy picked her up and covered her with kisses.

'Little Willie sometimes forgets her crutch,' said Jeannette, in explanation; 'but we should be thankful that she gets about at all.

'Does the child sleep by herself in that big bed?' inquired the Canon of Jeannette, in a tone which Sophy, engaged in soothing the child's cries, could not overhear.

'No, sir; her mother sleeps there with her, and I in the other bed.'

'Does the poor little thing, then, require so much attendance?'

Jeannette shook her head; the expression of her face spoke volumes.

'*A mensâ et thoro*,' muttered the Canon.

The truth was that, when the child first met with her accident, her cries used to awake her mother at night, and consequently her father. As Mr. John Adair valued his sleep, as an investment, very highly, he did not wish to part with any portion of it.

'If you are so anxious about that child,

you had better sleep in the room with it,' he observed, sullenly; and Sophy had taken him at his word. Only, when little Willie's pains had ceased to be acute, she still kept to her quarters in the nursery.

Willie was mentally very precocious, though not in the same line as her great friend and patron, Stevie. She was even brighter at her spelling than he had been, but had none of his *naïveté* and high spirits. She did not concern herself with the government of the universe, or detect anomalies in it; if she had prejudices she concealed them; but nothing within her limited range escaped her notice. She worshipped her mother, and while being hugged to her bosom was the recipient of many a whispered confidence, which she understood much better than Sophy imagined, or she would never have breathed them. An elfin child—without the elfin mischief—who, burdened with an exceptional trouble, had a premature intelligence

which, when not kept in abeyance by physical pain, enabled her to bear and even make light of it. 'A most reasonable little patient,' said the doctor, since she never declined what was unsavoury, when once she had found it benefited her; a 'converted gutter child,' as Frederic Irton called her, somewhat to his wife's indignation, because she had the intelligence of the street Arab without his tricks; and to all eyes the quaintest little creature. Though not unlike her mother in feature, Willie differed wholly from her in expression. Sophy had always had something of the *beauté du diable*; Willie had an angel face full of life and motion, though (like one of those transposed photographs which tickled the public taste a year or two ago) it was set on a crippled body.

After luncheon the Canon proposed a walk to the Irtons', much more for his companion's sake (since he knew that Frederic would be in his city quarters) than his own; the sun

had come out brightly, and he thought the fresh air would do Sophy good. It seemed to do so, or perhaps the touch of the Canon's arm and his talk of old times brightened her face.

'I suppose,' he said, 'on fine mornings you sometimes walk part of the way with your husband to the City.'

The sunshine faded out of her eyes at once.

'No; he always takes a cab.'

'But is not that rather expensive? I should have thought, with his prudent habits, that an omnibus would have served his turn.'

'He says that that would be false economy; that time is money to a busy man; and, indeed, he does not seem to have one hour unoccupied.'

'Um! In my opinion that's rather over-doing it,' said the Canon, with the air of a man who has tried that system and discovered

its evils. 'It is not the mere hours by which work is measured, but what is done in them. If a man takes up a book or a newspaper, or whistles and goes to the window half a dozen times, I don't call that doing business.'

'I don't think my husband ever takes up a book at the office, or whistles,' observed Sophy.

'Then it's ten to one he does something worse—I mean fritters away his time still more absurdly,' said the Canon, with irritation. 'It is my experience that the men who are really busiest have the most leisure for everything. Nine hours at the office, you say. It's positively ridiculous that a man should keep at stock-broking for nine hours. I suppose he snatches an hour or two for luncheon?'

'I don't know,' answered Sophy.

Never, thought the Canon, with grave concern, had he met a young wife who knew less about her husband's ways than this one.

Henny received both her visitors with exceeding warmth, but, as one of them did not fail to observe (for just now the Canon had eyes for everything in connection with his ward), she evinced quite as much surprise at seeing Sophy as himself.

Mrs. Helford, indeed, who, as usual, was staying with her daughter, exclaimed cheerily, 'Well, this is an honour, Sophy; but I suppose, if the truth were told, we are indebted for it to your guardian.'

While she was engaging her young friend in conversation, the Canon took the opportunity of asking Henny whether she saw much of Sophy.

'I am sorry to say,' she answered, gravely, 'very little. Stevie sees most of her, because when he is here for the holidays he makes a point of going to cheer up little Willie. But it is not my fault, Canon, I do assure you. I go to Albany Street as often as I dare.'

'What do you mean by "dare"?'

'Well, to tell the honest truth, Mr. Adair and Frederic are not very fond of one another, and though, of course, dear Sophy always makes me welcome, my visits are not encouraged by her husband. She herself has not been here for months—though not, I am sure, because she has not wished to come.'

'Dear me,' said the Canon, 'that is very unfortunate for poor Sophy.'

'And for me, I do assure you. There is nothing that Fred and I would not do for her.'

'This takes me altogether by surprise,' said the Canon, disconsolately. 'I am come up here on a matter of business connected with Adair, but on which I should like to have had your husband's opinion, and I had almost thought of taking the responsibility of asking him to dine to-night in Albany Street, but it seems that that would be reckoning without my host.'

'It would, indeed,' said Henny, em-

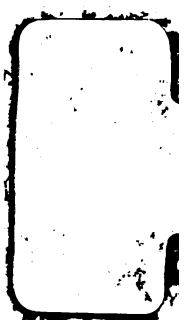
phatically. 'I could not ask Frederic to do such a thing. His best advice, however, and I need not say his assistance in every way, will, of course, be at your service.'

'Just so. It is possible I shall look in upon him to-morrow morning upon my way back to Cambridge. Will he be at his office?'

'I am quite sure he will, when he learns what I have to tell him. I should ask you to wait for him now; but, unfortunately, he cannot be home to-day till close upon seven o'clock. Some dreadful client from the country has cut me off an hour of his society.'

The Canon could not help reflecting with a sigh how different was Henny's tone in speaking of her husband to that of Sophy, and how cognisant she seemed to be of all his movements. The strained relations, however, between the two men did not much surprise him. Irton had never taken to Adair; had it not been so the Canon would,

perhaps, have consulted the solicitor in the first place upon the matter in hand; but it seemed to him disloyalty to Adair to speak to one who was unfriendly to him about his affairs before, at least, he had given an opportunity for explanation; there was also perhaps, some sense of humiliation, for any such application to Irton would have been a tacit confession that he himself had suspicions of the man whom he had always upheld and stuck by. On the whole that visit to Maida Vale had by no means set his mind at ease as to the business on which he had come up to town—but the contrary.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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